

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS: UNCLE SAM'S NEW RECRUITS

AUGUST 2007

IN THESE TIMES

Dick Cheney:
evil or a **weasel**?

Sex, aptitude
and lady **fingers**

A man with dark hair, wearing a tan button-down work shirt over a light blue t-shirt, stands in the foreground. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background shows a suburban neighborhood with houses, trees, and a clear blue sky.

CAN EDWARDS MAKE UNIONS MATTER?

DAVID MOBERG REPORTS

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a decisive moment**



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Death From Above

ON JUNE 22, the Operation Iraqi Freedom website issued a press release that hyped a devastating blow against 17 al-Qaeda terrorists, who were gunned down by coalition attack helicopters at Khalis, Iraq, a small town outside of Baqouba. But when the BBC visited the town days later, the villagers told a different story. The men attacked by coalition forces were not al-Qaeda members, but local village guards, who only minutes earlier had been helping Iraqi police raid a suspect's house. (It turned out to be a false alarm.) Eleven of the men were killed when U.S. helicopters suddenly appeared, raining missiles and heavy machine gunfire upon them. "It was like a battlefield, but with the fire going only in one direction," one local witness said. "There was no return fire."

These tragic deaths represent more than another sad chapter in the Pentagon's Tolstoyan-length *Book of Lies*. At the same time Iraq has undergone a "surge" of an extra 28,000 U.S. troops, the country has experienced a surge in the number of U.S. bombs dropped on it. On June 11, the Associated Press' Charles J. Hanley reported that in the first four and a half months of 2007, the U.S. Air Force dropped 237 bombs and missiles on Iraq, eight more than in all of 2006. (Those totals don't include cannon rounds or rocket fire, nor any weaponry fired by Marine Corps aircraft.) It's no surprise the number of Iraqi civilians killed by coalition forces has surged as well.

According to Iraq Body Count (IBC), a British anti war group that tabulates Iraqi civilian deaths reported by the media, civilian deaths by air strikes, rose steadily toward the end of 2006, before increasing by 25 percent this year, to an average of more than 50 a month. Due to its passive methodology, IBC's numbers—while valuable in capturing trends—are likely conservative. Johns Hopkins University epidemiologists, writing in the *Lancet*

last October, reported that coalition air strikes caused 13 percent of all violent civilian deaths between March 2003 and June 2006. At the time the survey ended, which was before the escalation of air strikes in late 2006, and the even greater escalation in 2007, the estimate stood at more than 78,000 Iraqis killed by coalition aircraft.

The situation in Afghanistan might be worse. As Hanley noted, the 237 munitions dropped in Iraq pale to the 929 bombs and missiles dropped in Afghanistan in the first four and a half months of this year. That number does not include the bombs dropped on June 18 on a madrassa—claimed by the military to be an "al-Qaeda hideout"—that killed seven Afghan children. Nor does it include the bombs dropped four days later on the village of Kunjakak that claimed the lives of at least 25 civilians, including nine women and three babies.

That last attack, the coup de grace of a 10-day period that saw coalition forces kill 90 civilians, prompted the normally pliant Afghan President Hamid Karzai to hold a press conference in which he castigated NATO and U.S. forces for treating Afghan civilian lives as "cheap." In response, a NATO spokesman promised the coalition would "do better."

The promise held for five days, until coalition forces responded to a Taliban ambush outside the southern town of Hyderabad by bombing several compounds in the village, resulting in 45 civilian deaths. That raised the number of Afghan civilians killed by coalition forces this year, mostly through airstrikes, to more than 300, which the Afghan government, the AP and aid organizations all report is higher than the number of civilians ruthlessly killed by the Taliban.

If it wasn't clear before, it is shamefully obvious now that using massive air power to combat guerilla insurgencies isn't merely ineffective or counterproductive in fighting terrorism. It is terrorism and, like all its forms, it must be opposed.

—Brian Cook

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



5 Number of years that 38-year-old priest Daniel McCormack, who is white, was sentenced to prison for sexually abusing five boys in Chicago.

10 Number of years that 17-year-old Genarlow Wilson, who is black, was sentenced to prison for receiving consensual oral sex from a 15 year-old girl in Georgia in 2003.

41 Percentage of male prisoners who were black in 2006.

13 Percentage of all college students who were black in 2005.

“

He who is the author of a war lets loose the whole contagion of hell and opens a vein that bleeds a nation to death.

”

—THOMAS PAINE

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

When it comes to secret agents and secret payments, nobody does it better than the Brits. On June 7, the *Guardian* (of London) reported that BAE, Europe's largest weapons manufacturer, had wired nearly \$2 billion to Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia over at least a 10-year period via the U.S.-based Riggs Bank. What's more, BAE did it with the full knowledge of the British government, which quashed an investigation into the shady deal-

ings in December when the U.K. attorney general warned that further investigation would publicly reveal "government complicity."

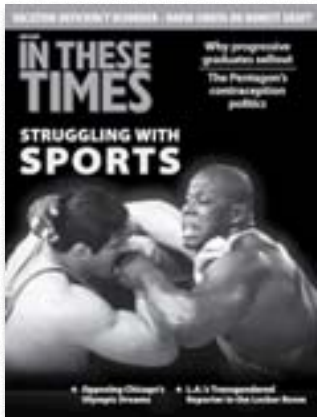
THE QUO:

Bandar helped broker the £43 billion Al-Yamanah arms deal in 1985 between BAE and Saudi Arabia, the largest in British history, which has sent 120 Tornado airplanes, Hawk warcraft and other military equipment to The Kingdom. The U.S. Department of



Justice has opened an inquiry into whether BAE—which is currently attempting to buy the U.S. arms firm Armour Holdings—violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by bribing a foreign official in U.S. jurisdiction.

letters



Where's Debs?

I have been thinking of writing to you for some time, but when one gets into the octogenarian phase of life, action tends to be delayed.

I have supported *In These Times* for several years and I enjoy reading each issue as I receive it. However, I have been disturbed over the last year or so because the magazine seems to have become more a voice for progressive Democrats than for Debsian socialism.

I am well aware that in the present climate a third party has no chance for success at the national level, and that the Democrats are a couple of degrees better than the Republicans.

However, the progressive policies of the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, weak as they were, were achieved partly because of fear of growing third party movements. I believe the Democrats will become more democratic only if other groups build a fire under them.

Of all the candidates making a bid for the nomination, the only one who speaks with a clear, constant voice

and who has a holistic view is Dennis Kucinich. He knows, given the nature of his party, that he has very little chance of gaining the nomination. However, in the tradition of Gene Debs, he is trying to raise public consciousness. The major media hardly mention him and his ideas, which is not surprising.

But why does *In These Times*, which generally agrees with him and also wants to educate the public, not give

I am disturbed—*In These Times* seems to have become more a voice for progressive Democrats than for Debsian socialism.

him and his programs more coverage and support? After all, our purpose is to inform, not to win.

Robert C. Delk
Bloomington, Ind.

Paid leave

In regards to David Moberg's "What Vacation Days?" (July), Washington State just became the second state to pass a paid family leave bill.

It wasn't easy, but it has generated renewed interest in a policy I have worked on for more than a dozen years. New Jersey and New York also appear to be close to passing legislation on this issue.

One new element: MomsRising.org, a MoveOn.org-type grass roots e-community weighed in with thousands of focused, timely e-mails to members and the governor.

Sen. Karen Keiser
33rd District,
Washington State Senate

Get a job

I just read Adam Doster's "When College Ends, So Does Activism" (July). What a sad perspective. Though well researched and presented, his core argument is passive and flat. Accepting the fact that there are no real alternatives to activism as a "career" or "profession" contradicts what activism is all about—questioning the root of the problem and working for change.

Incredible things can be accomplished with the proper

focus, energy, initiative and relationships. Our paychecks, careers and lives are a part of the same equation. I am 27, I work full time and travel around the world educating and empowering people that live near industrial pollution. I make \$35,000 a year and have full health, dental and eye insurance, and a retirement package. I have friends that have corporate jobs that pay more, and friends that have corporate jobs that pay less.

So much work needs to be done right now, it can be overwhelming. Each group I have worked with is looking for a few good folks, right now. The point I am making here is: don't settle.

We can enjoy our jobs and still have our paychecks aligned with our values. It is possible.

Ruth Breech
via e-mail

Plutocrats

Bryan Caplan's book, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, and Christopher Hayes' review of it make the fundamental error of confusing "democracy" as a form of government with "a republic" ("Who's Afraid of Democracy?," June). The United States is not a "democracy." It is a constitutional republic—it is a form of government where the populace elects representatives who are to enact laws, and who are supposed to safeguard the country's constitution. If bad policies emerge from the laws that the representatives enact, the voters are not "crazy"—they have just been lied to. An excellent, and timely, example of this process occurred in the 2006 election where a majority of the population wanted the Democrats to oust Bush and get the country out of the debacle in Iraq. But that didn't happen—the "representatives" had their own agenda, and they had simply conned the public.

Our "republic" has become a plutocracy—a government in the hands of the wealthy. These wealthy "representatives" are always going to make laws and enact policies that will enhance their own well-being and keep them in office. This process is so entrenched and so profitable to those on top, that it will not be reversed or uprooted at the polling booths. It is far more likely that the good old U.S.A. will, like all "plutocracies" before it, choke on its own greed and stupidity.

Peter Stewart
Towson, Md.

contributors

Dear Reader,

Last December, we asked you, the *In These Times* community, what you thought of InTheseTimes.com—what worked and what didn't, what you wanted from a website, and what *In These Times* meant to you. Your input was invaluable, and we've taken your suggestions to heart. In September, we'll be launching a new and improved InTheseTimes.com, which will include more membership opportunities, aggregated videos and a revamped blog, among other new features.

InTheseTimes.com will still feature the unique cultural analysis and hard-hitting news you've come to love, but will increase the interactivity of the site to foster **an on-line community that discusses, debates and acts—a community that furthers the progressive movement.**

We look forward to bringing our community together around ideas that matter. If you have any comments or ideas for how we can better harness InTheseTimes.com as a tool for the progressive movement, please email me at erin@inthesetimes.com.

Sincerely,



Erin Polgreen
Associate Publisher

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For more information call Anna Grace Schneider at 773-772-0100 x 242 or e-mail her at: anna@inthesetimes.com.



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Rigoberta Menchú (R) and her sister Anita (L) march in Guatemala City to memorialize their father's death.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JACOB WHEELER

Civil War By Other Means

Rigoberta Menchú's presidential bid could turn the page on Guatemala's bloody past

BY JACOB WHEELER

GUATEMALANS WILL GO TO the voting booths on Sept. 9 for their third national election since the country's bloody civil war ended in 1996. But 11 years later, the miseries of the 36-year *conflicto armado*, and its most notorious characters, are still visible across the landscape.

On one side is the Mayan indigenous-rights activist Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who etched her name in Guatemalan history after winning the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her work exposing the atrocities of the civil war. She is known internationally for her memoir, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, which brought to light the murder of her family, and the suffering of her people, at the hands of the U.S.-trained and -funded military counterinsurgency. Menchú is running for president, and though she is a long shot to reach the likely run-off on Nov. 4, the fact that she has entered the political mainstream after hiding out in Mexico and France during the '80s

speaks volumes to how far the country has come since the military put a price on her head.

On the other side is *El General*, Efraín Ríos Montt, the former dictator and evangelical preacher who, as general, and briefly, president, presided over the bloody massacres that raged between the coup d'états of March 1982 and August 1983. Montt is running for Congress this fall, and is almost guaranteed a seat since he heads the list of candidates for the right-wing Guatemalan Republican Front, one of the country's two largest parties.

If Montt wins, the 81-year-old will secure immunity—at least for the four-year length of his term—from a lawsuit charging him with genocide brought by Menchú and other activists. Those charges were initiated in the Spanish National Court in 1999, and in July 2006, Spain issued international arrest warrants for Montt and seven other former military and civilian

officials for their role in setting fire to the Spanish embassy in 1980, which killed the peasant activists hiding inside, as well as crimes committed during the "scorched earth" campaign of the early '80s that wiped out about 440 indigenous villages.

Prensa Libre, the main national newspaper, reported in January the discovery of "Plan Sofia," which links the Army high command to Montt in July 1982—four months after he seized the presidency. With Montt's authorization, Plan Sofia intended to "deny guerilla access to the civil population, those who nourish them and within whom they hide. ... The destruction of the guerilla forces is the mission." The Guatemalan Attorney General's office has yet to act on it.

The town of Nebaj, in the northwest department of Quiché, was the site of one of the massacres carried out under Plan Sofia. Early one morning in September 1982, military helicopters flew over the village and opened fire, believing that rebel forces were hiding there. A seven-year-old boy named Diego Rey Mundo de Leon was one of the villagers who ran toward the mountains to escape the helicopters—right into the awaiting sights of a machine gunner's nest, which mowed them down like stalks of corn. Miraculously, the army found the boy alive and took pity on him, airlifting him to Guatemala City where he was saved and taught Spanish by the soldiers. More than two decades later, when asked what Leon would do to Ríos Montt if he had the dictator alone in a room, the otherwise soft-spoken young man swore, "I'd kill him with my bare hands."

As for Menchú, the 48-year-old Quiché-Mayan activist lost both of her parents, two brothers, a sister-in-law, and three nieces and nephews to the military death squads. Her father, Vicente Menchú, was among the 39 peasants and student activists who occupied the Spanish embassy that Montt's fellow defendants are charged with setting alight. In 1981, Menchú went into hiding, and fled to Mexico. Two years later, in Paris, she told her life story to the Venezuelan-French writer Elisabeth Burgos, who transcribed *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. But even after winning the 1992 Nobel Prize, Menchú was only able to safely return home after the

Peace Accords were signed in 1996.

Guatemala's most famous Mayan Indian since the legendary Tecún Aman, who fell while fighting the Spanish *conquistadores*, has now put aside her activist label. According to newspapers, she trails both Álvaro Colom of the left-of-center National Union of Hope and Otto Pérez Molina of the right-of-center Patriot Party by wide margins. But that an indigenous woman is running at all would have been unfathomable 10 years ago.

"She's a national hero who isn't nearly as radical anymore," says Iduvina Hernandez, executive director of the Association for the Study and Promotion of Security in a Democracy, which monitors threats against human rights in Guatemala. "It's a positive sign that she's running, though she doesn't have a chance to win. She's merely testing the waters."

Enrique Davis, an advisor to Menchú based in Mexico, admits that, if elected, she wouldn't try to carry out the kind of radical agrarian reforms that prompted the United States to engineer a coup in 1954 against the leftist government of Jacobo Arbenz—an action that spiraled the country into civil war six years later. But,

Davis says, she would push for economic and social responsibility sorely lacking in a country where 10 percent of the population owns half of the wealth, and more than 50 percent survive on less than \$2 a day.

"She's not going to close your business or socialize things," he says, referring to Guatemala's rich, landowning and mostly light-skinned elite. "But you need to pay taxes and accept some co-responsibility for making the country better. It's not enough to become a millionaire—you have to do something for this country, too."

As for the nightmares of the country's past, Menchú won't forget them, and the lawsuits against the likes of Montt will continue until they are brought to justice. "We need to continue forward," says Davis, "and not just talk about the past, but these lawsuits are part of the healing process, and they will continue."

The ultimate irony would be if Menchú somehow won the election, and her nemesis Montt seized the top spot in Congress. According to tradition, the man accused of genocide would swear in the victim, and place the *banda presidencial*, a cloth with the blue and white colors of the Guatemalan flag, on her shoulders. ■

The Drug War's Collateral Damage

WHEN A PERSON is sent to prison for the first time on a drug-related felony charge, there is little chance that he or she will be told about the "collateral consequences" of their sentence.

The severity of these residual punishments depends on the state. "Life Sentences: The Collateral Sanctions Associated with Marijuana Offenses," a report released in July by the Center for Cognitive Liberty and Ethics (CCLE), ranks Florida, Delaware, Alabama, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Virginia, Utah, Arizona and South Carolina as the 10 states with the worst records for continuing the punishments of people who have already served their time.

"Life Sentences" author Richard Boire writes that the long-term sanctions for drug crimes, even for relatively benign drugs like marijuana, can exceed those of violent crimes like premeditated assault, rape and murder. Intense criminalization of drugs began with the Nixon adminis-

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In West African storytelling, a griot is a highly respected member of the community who acts as a living repository of births, deaths, marriages and significant events. In this tradition, the StoryCorps' Griot initiative will travel the United States this summer, recording the stories of African-American families and preserving their collective history.

The initiative, which began in February 2007 and will end in February 2008, is the largest oral-history project of its kind since 2,300 former slaves were interviewed in the mid-'30s as part of the Work Project Administration's Federal Writers Project.

StoryCorps participants record their stories in pairs, usually one interviewing the other, in a mobile recording studio, and at the end of a 40-minute session, they each receive a CD of their interview. Radio stations and historically black colleges and universities have teamed up with StoryCorps to record and distribute the stories of 1,750 African Americans.

"For many it has been the first time in life that they could express deeply held feelings," says Melvin Reeves, StoryCorps manager.

Griot's Mobile StoryBooth will make six-week stops in Chicago, Oakland, Calif., Clarksdale, Miss., Memphis, Tenn., New York City, and Selma and Montgomery, Ala. Reservations for the Griot tour can be made by calling (800) 850-4406 or visiting www.storycorpsgriot.net.

—Gabrielle Sinclair



tration, which ignored its own appointed "marihuana" commission's recommendation that legalization for personal use was a logical alternative to costly and ineffective criminalization. The drug war intensified during the Reagan era and has since grown worse: Today, fully 45 percent of 1.5 million annual drug arrests are related to marijuana.

Up until the early '90s, people who smoked pot were rarely arrested in large numbers. If sentenced, most users and small-time dealers did not face long sentences. That has changed. According to the Washington D.C.-based Sentencing Project, marijuana-related arrests jumped up by 113 percent from 1990 to 2002, while overall drug arrests only increased by three percent during that time. Meanwhile, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has linked smoking weed to everything from teen violence to terrorism.

"ONDCP's crusade seems to get more incoherent and detached from reality every day," says Bruce Mirken, communications director for the Marijuana Policy Project. "One minute they say marijuana makes you an apathetic slug, the next they say it turns you into a violent gangbanger. Neither has the remotest connection with reality, and these latest claims of a link between marijuana and violence are based on shameless manipulation of statistics taken completely out of context."

Government-funded propaganda has been disseminated everywhere, from ads in some progressive magazines, to press releases regurgitated as "news" on cable stations like FOX News, to websites such as BlackNews.com, which recently posted an ONDCP article, "Early Marijuana Use an Early Warning Sign for Gang Involvement." For all of its hoopla about the consequences of drug use, the ONDCP hasn't shown an interest in documenting the problems faced by those convicted of felony drug charges after release.

Job applicants must inform potential employers, upon request, of past felonies, no matter how long ago they happened. The resulting job discrimination pushes many former prisoners back into the underground economy, contributing to the fact that two-thirds of former prisoners recidivate.

Former drug-related offenders have been further punished by stipulations signed into law in 1996, without congressional or public debate, as a part of the Welfare Reform Act. Former convicts

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North Dakota, Washington, Hawaii, Iowa, Nevada, Wyoming, California, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Vermont, District of Columbia, Maine, Missouri, Rhode Island, New York, New Mexico

The Life Sentences report examines collateral sanctions associated with marijuana offenses, and ranks states in order of severity.

can now be denied public housing, food stamps, Temporary Aid for Needy Families and scholarships for higher education. Other limits on freedoms include the denial of vocational licensing and certification for some professions, voting rights, suspension of driver's licenses—regardless of whether the offense had anything to do with an automobile—and lifetime bans on the adoption of a child.

Equally serious is that incarcerated men and women, especially those who do not have the physical size or prowess to fight off predators, can be extorted, bullied, beaten, molested or raped by guards and fellow inmates. "Stories from Inside: Prison Rape and the War on Drugs," a study released earlier this year by Los Angeles-based Stop Prisoner Rape, estimates that as many as one in four female and one in five male prisoners experience sexual violence while incarcerated. The real numbers are likely to be higher because of underreporting related to fear of repercussion or stigma.

"While anyone can be a victim of prisoner rape," the report states, "inmates convicted of a non-violent drug offense typically possess characteristics that put them at great risk for abuse. They tend to be young, unschooled in the ways of prison life, and lacking the street smarts necessary to protect themselves from other detainees."

—Silja J.A. Talvi

Mainers Give Grads Debt Relief

ANDREW BOSSIE WAS tired of bad ballot referendums. After spending the fall of 2005 with Maine student activists and the League of Young Voters fighting a referendum that would have gutted an anti-discrimination bill written to protect Maine's gay population, he decided to go on the offensive and use the same process to address the needs of Maine's students.

"People were dropping out of school because they couldn't afford it, people were leaving the state after graduation instead of contributing back and growing the economy," he says. "It was a huge problem."

So the former University of Southern Maine student body president and his newly created political action committee, Opportunity Maine, developed a proposal that would ease some of the financial burden of going to college. Then, Bossie and 500 volunteers logged more than 12,000 hours canvassing on street corners in the brutal Maine winter to gather the 73,000 signatures needed to put their proposal on the ballot in the November 2007 election.

But a funny thing happened on the way to election day. Legislators grew so enamored with the bill that they pre-emptively passed it—only the sixth time in a century that Maine lawmakers enacted a citizen's initiative without sending it to statewide referendum. So as of June 22, help is on the way for Maine students in the form of Opportunity Maine, an innovative local answer to the student debt crisis.

Opportunity Maine authorizes tax credits to refund educational loan payments for any Mainer who earns an associate's or bachelor's degree in Maine and then proceeds to live, work and pay taxes in the Pine Tree State after graduation. While the amount available for the credit would be capped at the cost of tuition and fees for the University of Maine system or the Maine Community College system, students at costlier private colleges can also apply for the break. As it stands, a graduate with a bachelor's degree can be reimbursed up to \$2,100 per year for four years. And, in a coup for the business community, employers can agree to make the loan payment on behalf of hired students and then claim the tax credit themselves.

This particular bill is good for Mainers because the state's economy is at a crossroads. The decline in quality manufacturing and natural resource-based jobs has caused average income to drop 30 percent below the New England average. Meanwhile, Maine has one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country, but only 57 percent of students pursue higher education, mainly because of financial constraints. And those who do graduate college leave school with an average debt of more than \$21,000 (the seventh highest in the nation), a main reason why 53 percent of students leave Maine for higher compensation in places like Massachusetts.

While the state's economy is on the ropes, all is not lost. According to "Charting Maine's Future," an October 2006 report by the Brookings Institution, the building blocks for a diverse and vibrant economy remain. For one, in the past seven years the state has witnessed a substantial population boom, jumping from 46th to 26th in the country in annualized growth rate. Maine also outperformed the nation in job creation during the last economic cycle and has seen growth (albeit humble) in high-tech industries like boat-building, advanced materials and biotechnology. But, the report warns, "Maine's aging population includes too few young workers and too few highly skilled or educated people."

"There's been a growing awareness of how important it is to have a highly educated population if you want to stimulate an economy and be competitive," says Anya Kamenetz, author of *Generation Debt*. "And Maine is very aware that they have catching up to do."

The bill's major strength is its attractiveness to multiple constituents. It eases the increasing burden of college payment for students and their families. Businesses will grow more competitive with an influx of talented applicants. The state will benefit with an injection of new tax dollars and consumption. And proponents claim that financially, the proposal will break even or better by 2015, as the state generates more income as a result of higher income taxes and a stronger economy. "I think the essence of it appeals to a lot of people because it's a really good idea and one that's really needed," says Brian Hiatt, communications director for the League of Young Voters.

Some critics contend that the law should also include Maine residents who attend out-of-state colleges but still want

to move back home. Others question its focus on Maine at the expense of the national economy. But such dissenters are few and far between. Kamenetz says creating incentives for educational attainment could strike a chord with students' rights' activists nationwide.

"While it's a really isolated local effort, it does go farther than most of these national actions because you're actually paying off people's loans, you're not just lowering the payment," says Kamenetz. "If it does have an economic benefit for Maine, it has a chance to be a model for others."

—Adam Doster



An Iraqi worker shuts down a pumping tube at the Iraqi Pipelines Company in Basra on June 5. Employees there recently went on strike, shutting down two pipelines carrying oil and gas products inside Iraq.

Iraqi Unions Fight the New Oil Law

IRAQ'S PROPOSED OIL law, which would open up control of the country's oilfields to multinational corporations, is one of the Bush administration's top political priorities. On July 3, Bush called Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to encourage him and other leaders to move "aggressively forward" on it, and as *In These Times* went to press, its latest draft appeared headed to the Iraqi Parliament for debate. Even if it passes, however, enacting it won't be easy, as it faces strong opposition from Iraqi oil workers.

"It doesn't serve the interests of the

Iraqi people,” says Faleh Abood Umara, general secretary of the Basra-based Southern Oil Company Union and the Iraqi Federation of Oil Workers’ Unions. Umara recently toured the United States, advocating both national control of Iraqi oil assets and immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Umara says that the law—“written in the United States”—would permit joint ownership of many Iraqi oil fields by foreign companies, which could export much of the oil and profits from these fields for up to 35 years under what are called “production sharing agreements.”

“We want the national Iraqi oil company to make service contracts with the companies, not partnerships,” Umara said in an interview, shortly after dedicating a plaque that extolled international labor solidarity at the Chicago monument to the Haymarket workers, whose protests in 1886 led to the declaration of May Day as the international workers’ holiday.

“We want new technology for the production of oil but to have foreign companies work with Iraqi workers and professionals for a limited time,” he says. “We are not opposed to being developed

with advanced and imported technology, but we would like to be sole owner of our wealth and use it to develop our country and cities.”

The proposed oil law partly would govern distribution of revenue, which Umara says the oil workers’ unions want directed to a national redevelopment fund. But the Bush administration has long wanted to give foreign oil companies as much control as possible over Iraqi oil fields. Under the law, the Iraqi national company would have to compete with foreign companies for production rights, Umara says. Antonia Juhasz, an analyst for the watchdog group Oil Change International, says that the law gives foreign oil companies great flexibility, with no requirement to hire or invest profits locally, and opens the door to the long-term production-sharing agreements that other Middle East oil-producing nations have rejected as exploitative.

The oil workers’ opposition to the law could prove a serious obstacle to the already much-delayed legislation. In June, oil pipeline workers struck for a week “for the rights of workers and against the proposed law,” including demands on compa-

nies to live up to promises for profit-sharing, affordable housing construction and other benefits, Umara says. Although the government had frozen union assets, issued warrants for union leaders’ arrests and even worsened the old labor law from Saddam’s era—preserved by the Provisional Coalition Authority—Umara says the 23,000-member union, representing 36,000 workers, is growing stronger. In 2003, the union forced Halliburton out of the oil fields, which inspired port workers to oust the Danish shipping company Maersk from the docks.

The oil workers’ union also wants U.S. troops to start withdrawing immediately. “I’d rather they withdraw yesterday than today,” Umara says. “I assure you, chaos will not happen, and even if it happened, I’m very sure we can solve our own problems.”

Different religious and ethnic groups cooperate now in a Basra controlled by the Iraqi security forces, he says. While the average oil worker still worries about security, their main concern is the future of Iraq’s oil.

“Most important,” says Umara, “is not to let that new oil law pass.”

—David Moberg

appall-o-meter

3.1 Islamist Mouse Jumps Shark

“Farfur,” the lovable Mickey Mouse lookalike who stole Palestinian kiddies’ hearts, is dead. He was bludgeoned to death, on his TV show’s final episode, by an Israeli agent who had only moments before tried to buy Farfur’s land. Saraa, the host of the program, helpfully explained that Farfur was done in “by the killers of children.”

Yes, the folks at Hamas do television differently.

The program was a staple of the political movement’s al-Aqsa channel. According to the BBC, Israeli and Palestinian authorities alike were none too thrilled with the furry critter’s message to tots. Farfur’s message tended to be a little heavy for young ears.

“You and I are laying the foundation for a world led by Islamists,” he once told viewers. “We will return the Islamic community to its former greatness, and liberate Jerusalem, God willing, liberate Iraq, God willing, and liberate all the countries of the Muslims invaded by the murderers.”

Hamas maintains that they yanked the

show, “Young Pioneers,” to make room for new programming. Can’t wait to see that.

1.0 Slackabomber Nabbed

Riverside, Calif., layabout Audley Yung has been charged with six felony counts, including possession of a destructive device, arson and making criminal threats, all because he was afraid of breaking a little bad news to his mom.

According to police, Yung made a bomb out of a wine bottle and some gasoline and left it next to a tree on the University of California-Riverside campus, which he had doused with gas and set alight. He also sent bomb threats in the mail and over the Internet to university officials.

The incidents managed to delay some commencement ceremonies at Riverside, according to the Associated Press, which was precisely Yung’s objective. His mother was under the impression that Yung was due to graduate, and was planning to drive down from northern California to attend the cer-



emony. Yung claims he just didn’t have the heart to tell her that he’d dropped out.

3.3 Alas, Poor Yorick, I Ashed In His Cranium

It seems only fair that we cut gravediggers a little slack, if for no other reason than the elevated ass temperatures they have to deal with every 4th of July. But

Keith Chartrand of Fitchburg, Mass., has pushed our indulgence to the limit. Chartrand, 30, was discovered to be in possession of a skull and a thighbone he most likely pilfered from St. Bernard’s Cemetery. He had apparently fashioned the skull into an ashtray and the thighbone into a pipe.

Police discovered the trophies after Chartrand’s wife called them to report that the gravedigger had just killed her dog. In a court appearance, according to AP, Chartrand told the judge the charges of grave tampering and cruelty to animals were “bogus.”

—Dave Mulcahey

Despite Raids, IDs For All

ON JUNE 4, New Haven, Conn., became the first city in the country to authorize a municipal identity card for use by both citizens and undocumented immigrants. Thirty-six hours after the city council approved the card, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) staged a citywide raid that led to the arrest of 31 people. In some cases, ICE agents, entering apartments without warrants, took parents away in front of their children. City officials and community activists charge that ICE is retaliating for the city's immigrant-friendly policies, although the feds deny that. New Haven has vowed to roll out the new IDs sometime in late July.

The Board of Aldermen approved the measure by a vote of 25 to 1, but required that the program's expenses be covered by outside funds. The cards will cost \$10 and be good for five years. Applicants must show proof of identity and proof of residence, but for those who have no documentation, the city will accept an affidavit from a social service agency vouching for that person.

The sole Republican board member voted no, saying she feared creating the ID would bring even more illegal immigrants into the city of 125,000 and strain the city's finances.

Opposition has also come from two of the people opposing Mayor John DeStefano as he seeks an eighth two-year term as mayor. One of them, James Newton, an economic and political consultant, says the cards are a cruel hoax.

"When people get that card they feel redeemed," he says. "The problem is, New Haven is not a country unto itself. New Haven cannot be a municipality-type government that supercedes the federal government." He says the raids were proof of that.

The card can be used in a variety of ways—as a debit card at businesses, drawing down on the money card holders put in their bank accounts, a library card, a card to pay the city's parking meters and as proof of residency for admission to city parks. City officials, Latino service organizations and members of the faith community all agreed that such a card would help protect immigrants from robbery and violence. Without a social security

snapshot



BAGHDAD, IRAQ— Nashwan, a 14-year-old orphan, sits on a chair after he was transferred to the Dar al-Hanan orphanage in June. Nashwan was discovered in a darkened room with 23 other naked and abused boys in an orphanage following a military raid in an area northwest of Baghdad. (Photo: AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP/Getty Images)

number to open a bank account, undocumented workers often carry a week's pay in cash, making them vulnerable to attack. Two major banks—First City Bank and Sovereign—have already agreed to honor the cards, and 50 retail businesses, mini-marts and restaurants are lined up to accept payment from the cards. The city expects many legal citizens to get the cards for the convenience they offer, and others have already signed up to apply for the cards as an act of solidarity with the undocumented.

The arrests by ICE have provoked widespread condemnation among New Haven residents, like Puerto Rican Hector Santiago. "We are all Latino," he said as he visited with several Peruvian men on their porch one recent evening. "I feel for them. I don't agree with the raids. They are not criminals; they're just workers who are trying to support their families."

Most of the opposition to the IDs has come from outside the city, as anti-immigrant groups have hailed the ICE crackdown as necessary. Jerry Kristafer, a local talk show host, referred to immigrants as "raping us financially."

After being jailed in various out-of-state

prisons for a week, the arrested immigrants received a bond hearing in Hartford on June 14.

Fátima Rojas, of Unidad Latina en Acción, a group which pushed for the municipal ID, says many people in Fair Haven, the heavily Latino section of the city where the raids took place, have been calling, afraid to go to work or send their kids to school.

A spokeswoman for the northeast regional office of ICE says the raid was a routine operation targeting specific individuals. She denied it was in response to the creation of the municipal IDs.

However, of the 31 arrested, only four had outstanding warrants. The rest were picked up after they were found in the targeted apartments or on the street and were unable to produce immigration documents.

Meanwhile, city officials are working with community agencies, grassroots organizations and churches to let people know exactly what the card can and cannot do. Yet in the wake of the raids, it remains to be seen how many undocumented residents will take advantage of the program.

—Melinda Tuhus

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Is Cheney Evil or Just a Weasel?



THE DARK LORD. Voldemort. Darth Vader. The Shadow President. These threatening, macho soubriquets have been applied to Dick Cheney over the past six years, and are in rapid circulation in the wake of recent charges that Cheney's office, beginning in 2003, refused to submit annual reports about how it classifies secret documents to the National Archives' Security Oversight Office. Turns out Cheney claims to be above such laws. The

Washington Post's June 24-27 series by Pulitzer Prize winner Barton Gellman and Jo Becker about Cheney's ruthless and determined consolidation of power in the White House has further burnished the Dark Lord aura.

But the time has come to dispatch these heavily armored nicknames and go with another. I propose "Weasel." In an era when image is everything, it's time to change the image and attack the power.

Yes, Cheney has been scary for a long time, has done evil things, and his iron-jawed, gravel-voiced, unflinching assertion of certitude (often in clear contradiction to the Constitution) has protected him and his policies. But by likening him to He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named, we confirm his power rather than undermine it. That's why I like "Weasel." Other comparable nominations are most welcome, as long as they convey furtiveness, evasion, prevarication and cowardice.

Obsessed with secrecy and domination, Cheney is a bully. And within every bully lies a coward, someone, for example, who waits 20 hours before notifying the media that he has accidentally shot a friend and then has a woman make the announcement for him. Macho, macho man.

Cheney's long overdue need for ridicule is why we should be grateful that so many young people get their news from *The Daily Show*. Cheney's office made the preposterous assertion that he didn't have to comply with the Executive Order mandating the annual reports to the National Archives because he wasn't part of the executive branch. Unfortunately for a dignified correspondent like ABC's Martha Raddatz, the constraints of her job confined her to reporting, with a straight face, that Cheney has used "the opposite argument in the past, citing executive privilege when asked for information about his travel and visitors to his office."

Jon Stewart, under no such proscriptions, can provide the level of disbelief that matches the outrageousness of this latest Cheney gambit. What *The Daily Show* consistently does best is juxtapose video of administration officials making their bo-

gus pronouncements with video clips from the past, showing them saying the exact opposite. So Stewart showed Cheney on tape emphatically asserting executive privilege because he's in the, er, executive branch. Stewart then looked into the camera to tell Americans that Cheney has always meant "to come up to us personally and say 'go fuck ourselves.'"

Now, for the sake of comparison, let's imagine an administration official who has made a decision that goes very wrong, one in which people, including children, die. This official, only on the job for a month, could have blamed the FBI, which had urged the disastrous course of action, but did not. Instead, the official said, simply, "I'm responsible."

That official was Janet Reno and she immediately admitted that the decision to assault the Branch Davidian compound in Waco with tear gas, leading to a conflagration that killed

more than 80 people, was "obviously wrong." The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had begun the confrontation with the Branch Davidians on Feb. 28, 1993, two weeks before Reno was even confirmed; this

was a catastrophe she inherited and yet came to own. She did not hide from the press or retreat to an undisclosed location; she appeared on CNN and "Nightline," and told Ted Koppel, "I think it's one of the great tragedies of this time." As Laura Blumenfeld wrote for the *Post*, "It is clear that a different kind of bird has nested at Justice . . . The attorney general's candor may surprise those used to politicians who duck and cover when things go wrong." Several months later Reno's approval ratings were higher than Clinton's and she had one of the lowest unfavorable ratings of anyone in his administration. Nonetheless, because Reno was also deeply threatening to American gender norms—she simply looked at the masquerade of femininity women are supposed to don and said "No thanks"—she was the ongoing butt of jokes on Leno, Letterman and, of course, Will Ferrell's SNL "Janet Reno's Dance Party." No protective covering for her.

Commentary about Dick Cheney should now strip him of his various creepy veneers because they give him the cover that makes his power seem all that much more unassailable. As the indefatigable Rep. Henry Waxman, the *Post* and others go after him for his serial assaults on democracy and the rule of law, the macho language surrounding him should give way to images evoking an utter inability to ever face the music. Cheney et al. have attacked others who threaten their power with variations on the "girly-man" slur. But when you think about standing tall and alone, having true courage and taking the heat for your mistakes, who is the true girly-man: Janet Reno or Dick "Weasel" Cheney? ■

Cheney has done some scary things, but by likening him to He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named, we confirm his power rather than undermine it.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

The Squandering of Obama



I HAVE KNOWN BARACK Obama since the early '90s. My various conversations with him had convinced me he was an indelible progressive. I celebrated his entry into politics with his first election to the state senate from Illinois' 13th District, and he compiled a strikingly progressive legislative record during his seven-year stint.

Conditions conspired perfectly to grease Obama's route into the U.S. Senate and then into the presidential race. Those of

us following the "Obama phenomenon" from its inception were amazed by the magical, dreamlike quality of his ascent. A local astrologer explained it by noting a propitious celestial alignment in Obama's chart.

Perhaps astrology could best explain his meteoric rise. After all, what rational pundit would have predicted that a black candidate with a name like Barack Hussein Obama would become a U.S. senator and a legitimate presidential candidate during a war with Islamic terrorism?

The dream continues with Obama as a frontrunner in the Democratic primary race. Somehow, though, the magic has gone missing. The cut-and-parse, political calibrations employed by Obama's campaign staff have devalued enchantment and put a premium on marketing. His political masterminds have transformed Obama from a political visionary into an electoral product (with demographically designed components) just like every other presidential aspirant. His handlers have excised the very quality that distinguished Obama from the usual suspects.

No one in this well-populated brood of presidential candidates has yet said much about the incarceration crisis in black America, or the large black unemployment rate, or the chronically low quality of education in city schools, or anything else relating to the specific needs of the African-American electorate. That is no surprise for the GOP's gang of 11. It is surprising, however, that Democrats have been similarly reticent, since black voters are the party's largest and most faithful electoral bloc.

This avoidance is deliberate. Party strategists apparently believe American voters are less likely to choose Democratic candidates if they perceive them under the sway of the party's most loyal constituents. For example, candidate Bill Clinton's criticism of Sister Souljah's inflammatory comments in 1992 about the Los Angeles riots (now referred to as Clinton's "Souljah Moment") is often credited with helping

him win the votes of many "Reagan Democrats." He demonstrated a willingness to put blacks in their place.

Sophisticated African-American voters are expected to tolerate this perverse electoral tendency and squash their specific gripes for the good of the progressive whole. Obama's progressive supporters often utilize this argument to push back black demands for specific campaign attention.

Many of us familiar with Obama hoped he would help put an end to the Democrats' racial schizophrenia. Knowing him as a strong advocate of racial pride, with a deep knowledge of African-Americans' liberation struggle, we thought Obama was perfectly cast as the candidate who could bring needed perspective to our racial dilemma. Our past conversations led me to believe he would seek that role as well.

Perhaps he came to believe that political success was in-

compatible with efforts to promote a serious racial reckoning. He may have wanted to ride the Obama magic all the way to a progressive revolution, but was reined in by more seasoned political hands. You can almost hear their hypothetical argu-

ments: "Personal magic and charisma will take you only so far. The rest of the trip requires astute political calculations."

Political calculations must be the reason Obama is playing the "Bill Cosby card" (that is, focusing on individual behavior as the primary cause of racial disparity) in his latest speeches. He knows better than that. After all, Obama wrote the forward to the National Urban League's distressing 2007 report "The State of Black America: Portrait of the Black Male," which indicts institutional racism as the major culprit.

With his knowledge of context and his unique access to the public square, many wonder why Obama is focusing on issues that reinforce white Americans' denial of slavery's legacy. Some commentators point to that very focus as the reason for his popularity. Paul Street, for example, writes in the June 20 edition of the webzine, blackagendareport.com, "Obama allows whites to assuage their racial guilt and feel non-racist by liking and perhaps even voting for him while signaling that he won't do anything to tackle and redress the steep racial disparities and systematic racial oppression."

Street has been a consistent critic of the Obama phenomenon, but many of us who know the candidate begged to differ. We argued he was a true progressive who would use his extraordinary time in the limelight to speak unpopular truths about U.S. foreign and domestic policy while unflinchingly reminding the nation of its racial obligations.

That prospect was the magic ingredient in Obama mania. His strategists are busy squandering it. ■

Obama's political masterminds have transformed him from a political visionary into an electoral product, like every other presidential aspirant.

BY H. CANDACE GORMAN

Get Me Out of Gitmo



THE U.S. MEDIA is slowly developing a bark when it comes to the Bush administration's unconscionable detention policies. The fact that the great majority of Guantánamo's prisoners have never (and will never) be charged with any crime seems to be sinking in. Following Colin Powell's Johnny-come-lately call for Guantánamo to be shut down "not tomorrow but this afternoon," many major newspapers ran

editorials denouncing the prison camp.

Still, the mainstream media falls prey to distractions and distortions when it comes to Guantánamo. A recent spate of articles have focused on those few Guantánamo detainees who do not want to be deported to states where they fear they will endure (more) torture and detention or because our government claims that various foreign governments refuse to accept them.

The concern by certain detainees that they will be tortured in their homelands is certainly legitimate. Some of the men at Guantánamo had left their home countries because of persecution and resettled elsewhere when they were picked up for bounties and sent to Guantánamo. They rightly fear going back to their homeland. But the vast majority of the detainees at Guantánamo are willing and able to go home (or at least willing to risk going home rather than stay at Guantánamo). Why isn't the media talking about them? Once again the corporate media is being suckered by the Bush spin.

Recent coverage of the case of Libyan detainee Abdul al-Qassim, who has been cleared for release, gave the impression that the United States would move more decisively to release Guantánamo inmates if it weren't for the reluctance of foreign governments and the prisoners themselves to cooperate. A June 15 article on al-Qassim in the *Washington Post* described how the prisoner feared reprisals from Col. Muammar Gaddafi upon returning to Libya, since the U.S. government had falsely accused him of being a member of a militant anti-Gaddafi organization, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

In many cases, "terrorist" affiliations were sloppily assigned by nationality. Like al-Qassim and all other Libyans in Guantánamo, my Libyan client, Abdul al-Ghizzawi, was also listed as a member of the LIFG. Coincidentally, my Algerian client was also said to be a member of the LIFG because the military wrongly classified him as a Libyan. Al-Ghizzawi

has no objection to returning to Libya and fears no reprisals from Gaddafi because the accusations against him are absurd. He is very ill and is consumed by fears that he will die alone at Guantánamo. He wants nothing more than to be reunited with his family, either in Afghanistan or in Libya.

Having declared all of the men at Guantánamo to be the "worst of the worst," the Bushies feign shock and dismay when countries are not chomping at the bit to offer asylum to those few men that cannot go home. The real culprit in delaying the release of these men and boys is the U.S. government, which is trying desperately to save face in the middle of this legal and diplomatic disaster. There are foreign governments willing to take refugees, but the United States refuses to admit making mistakes in classifying these men as "enemy combatants" and places burdensome conditions

Having declared all of the men at Guantánamo the 'worst of the worst,' the Bushies feign shock when countries don't offer them asylum.

on countries that might accept them as refugees. Few self-respecting foreign governments will accept these absurd demands, which effectively extend U.S. detention policy into their own territories.

Saving face is also the chief concern of the United States in deciding when to release prisoners. About 80 men are currently cleared for release and hundreds more will follow. But releasing these innocent men all at once would effectively be a concession by Bush that the U.S. detention policies in the "war on terror" are broken. Instead, releases consist of a slow trickle of quietly departing prisoners, drawing minimal press attention—and minimal outrage. This trickle-out policy may have to change as the Supreme Court is signaling a willingness to take up the Guantánamo cases and as the military commissions system falls apart. Rumor has it that a shutdown could happen as early as July. (Coincidentally, the airport at Guantánamo will be closed for two weeks in July for "repaving.") We shall see.

The best outline for how prisoners should be released was formulated in "USA: Cruel and Inhuman," Amnesty International's recent report on Guantánamo. The report emphasized that Guantánamo's prisoners must be released unless they are charged with a recognizable crime and tried in accordance with international standards of justice. Moreover, Amnesty says that the United States is in no legal or moral position to demand foreign governments meet burdensome conditions on the transfer of prisoners. The report's most radical, and perhaps most sensible suggestion is that, to the extent that transfer to their homeland becomes impossible or undesirable, the United States offer the prisoner the option of U.S. asylum as a refuge. Don't hold your breath. ■

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Bloomberg Could Tie Centrists in Knots



WHEN NEW YORK City Mayor Michael Bloomberg looks at himself in the mirror, what do you suppose he sees?

A hard-nosed, no-nonsense businessman? A non-partisan political operator? Perhaps a nuts-and-bolts manager? Kingmaker, spoiler, billionaire? The next president of the United States?

It's a perplexing picture that offers up a cornucopia of possibilities. Bloomberg

has newly declared himself an independent. Independent runs for the presidency can be treacherous.

"Ralph Nader" became two very dirty words after a certain megalomaniac ensured the debacle of Election 2000. His ill-timed and ill-conceived independent bid ushered in an eight-year horror story.

What does the man in the mirror mean for the left? How will a Bloomberg candidacy—or even its potential—affect the role of the left in presidential politics?

Bloomberg's recent declaration of political independence last month sent shock waves through the Democratic and Republican sides of the burgeoning presidential contest.

A plethora of candidates from both parties—nearly 20 at last count—are scrambling for their respective nominations. If a third-party Bloomberg candidacy jumps into the fray, the presidential campaign would start to resemble a reprise of *Cheaper by the Dozen*.

Progressives may be too quick to dismiss the publishing magnate as too far off the reservation. In Gotham City, a surprisingly diverse number of pols and civic types are slyly and quietly trumpeting the possibilities.

With good reason. Take an issue like gun control. Bloomberg is right on the money. Listen to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama speak in nuanced and tremulous tones about balancing gun violence and civil liberties. They don't want to irritate the deer hunters of Pennsylvania, a la Al Gore.

Then listen to Bloomberg. In January 2006, he announced he would use his second mayoral term to campaign against what he called "the scourge of illegal guns."

According to the *New York Sun*, Bloomberg proclaimed he would take his gun-control crusade to "Albany, to Washington, and to every capital of every state

that permits guns to flow freely across its border."

Then listen to Tom Teepen, a columnist for Cox Newspapers in Atlanta, who wrote: "If there were an Oscar for sanity about guns Bloomberg not only would deserve it but alas, also would probably be the only nominee."

Gun control is also a signature issue for many progressives. By mid-June of this year, gun violence in Chicago had claimed the lives of 34 public-school students. Two notable civil-rights activists, the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson and Michael Pfleger, a Catholic priest, were arrested during a protest outside a busy gun store in Riverdale, a Chicago suburb. This is a gut issue for urbanites, and many were rooting for the Revs, including me.

Would a Bloomberg run, propped up by a very sturdy anti-gun plank, affect the presidential dialogue? You bet.

The Republicans may be shameless, but they are not stupid. My guess is that they won't commit political hari-kari and allow the Iraq War to dominate the 2008 election.

Here's the plan: move Iraq off the front page. Spin the troop stand downs, partial withdrawals, and whaddaya know—an 11th hour "victory."

When the air clears, domestic issues will take front and center. If Bloomberg runs, he will stymie the ability of the Democratic nominee to play both sides of the fence on issues like guns, gay rights, immigration and choice.

About those guns. Bloomberg has become a favorite target of the National Rifle Association, and he doesn't give a whit. That's because he has money, money, money. Prognosticators are predicting nominee wannabes will have to surpass the \$100 million fundraising mark to stay in the game.

Yawn. The architecture of the '08 race would be bent out of shape by a Bloomberg bid. Michael Bloomberg is worth about \$5.5 billion, according to the latest billionaire roster from *Forbes* magazine. A third-party bid by Bloomberg could inject some seriously filthy lucre into the race.

Massive media buys by Bloomberg would drive the debate on domestic issues.

Those kinds of bucks will create a contortion even a yoga instructor couldn't handle.

No one knows if Bloomberg will run. If he does, he could complicate the centrist tendencies of the Obamas, Clintons, et al. And that could be a very good thing. ■

If Bloomberg runs, he will stymie the ability of the Democrats to play both sides of the fence on issues like guns, gay rights, immigration and choice.

General Failure

An enduring crisis in civil-military relations threatens America's future

BY GREGORY D. FOSTER

LARGELY UNRECOGNIZED BY THE American public, unacknowledged by those in power, and denied by professionals in uniform, the United States suffers today from an enduring crisis in civil-military relations. The tacit social contract of mutual rights, obligations and expectations that binds the three parties to this relationship—the military, its civilian overseers and society—is seriously frayed.

This isn't a crisis in the popular sense of the term. We need not fear a coup d'état from a military thoroughly socialized to sublimate such dramatic recourse. Troops aren't occupying our homes (even though, as major newspapers and the American Civil Liberties Union have reported, they are monitoring our communications and infiltrating our gatherings). American combat units aren't disintegrating in combat or openly defying orders. And regular polls by Harris and Gallup indicate that, regardless of the performance and behavior of those in uniform, the public hold the military in higher esteem than most other institutions of society—though it remains a mystery how we should interpret these findings.

This crisis is more akin to a lymphoma or termite infestation—its symptoms hidden and unnoticed—that surreptitiously destroys the infrastructure of the body or edifice from within. In this case, the end result could prove to be America's strategic debilitation.

To grasp this crisis—its existence and its magnitude—we must consider how far the current state of civil-military relations in this country deviates from the ideal. A healthy state of civil-military relations requires: (1) a strategically effective (not just a militarily effective) military; (2) whose leaders provide strategically (not just militarily) sound advice to; (3) strategically competent civilian authorities—executive and legislative—who themselves



The U.S. military's posture of moral rectitude came a cropper with Abu Ghraib. Here an Iraqi looks at pictures of torture in a newspaper in Baghdad on Feb. 16, 2006.

are representative of and answerable to; (4) a civically engaged, strategically aware public; (5) all of which is undergirded by a critical free press, a vibrant civil society and a properly subordinated military-industrial complex. Today, we are failing on all these counts.

A strategically ineffective military

Far from strategically effective, today's military borders on being strategically dysfunctional, perhaps not even militarily effective. A strategically effective military would, at a minimum, fulfill its expected obligations under the social contract of civil-military relations: operational competence, sound advice, political neutrality and social responsibility.

Is the military operationally competent? If by that we mean can it successfully accomplish all it is called upon to perform (from conventional combat operations to counterinsurgency to peacekeeping to

disaster response)—without being disproportionately destructive, indiscriminately lethal, exorbitantly expensive or unduly escalatory—the answer is no. Iraq and Afghanistan are merely the latest examples of the military's unyielding preference for a single way of war—conventional combat operations against conventional foes. These ongoing campaigns are also emblematic of the military's resistance to seriously and permanently adapting to the unconventional operations (like counterinsurgency) against so-called asymmetric threats that characterize the global battlefield of today and tomorrow. Yes, there is a new army counterinsurgency field manual prepared under the hand of Gen. David Petraeus, the current U.S. commander in Iraq (See "Counterinsurgency 101," March 2007). But like numerous such field manuals during the Vietnam era, it is destined to have little enduring impact on how the military actually operates and sees itself.

Superimposed on this is the institu-

tion's chest-thumping culture of machismo, with its incessant talk of "warriors" and "warfighters." One need only observe news footage of the heavy-handed, culturally insensitive, firepower-intensive tactics of U.S. troops in the field, frequently given to undisciplined individual behavior born of fear, immaturity and inexperience, to grasp the results.

Does the military provide sound (strategic) advice to civilian decision-makers? Even traditionalist observers of civil-military relations who subscribe to the view that the proper preserve of the military is narrowly circumscribed military advice must answer no. Whatever Gen. Petraeus may say or eventually accomplish, the desultory U.S. performance to date in Iraq and Afghanistan is an outgrowth of failed military advice from senior officers unable to rise above their tactical and technical conditioning. In fact, deep-seated anti-intellectualism and an attendant institutional bias for action have prompted those in uniform to seek comfort in tactical and technical thinking, and thereby robbed them of the capacity to think strategically.

Is the military politically neutral? That is, are its personnel sufficiently divorced from involvement in, or undue influence by, partisan politics that they do not compromise the objectivity expected of them? Are they similarly neutral on ideological, religious and cultural grounds? The answer, in all cases, is no. Consider the increasing tendency of retired generals and admirals to endorse political candidates; the outspokenness of the retired generals who called for the ouster of then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (after they had their pensions safely in hand); the willingness of the military to let its units and personnel be repeatedly used as political props by the commander in chief; even the emergence of outspoken lower-ranking active-duty antiwar groups such as "Appeal for Redress From the War in Iraq." Consider as well the pronounced conservative bias (and Republican political preferences) of most in uniform; the increasing religiosity of service personnel (ranging from Lt. Gen. William G. Boykin, the No. 2 intelligence official in the Pentagon, to evangelical Christians at the Air Force Academy); the deeply entrenched institutional bias against and persistent persecution of homosexuals in uniform, legitimized most recently by the anti-gay remarks of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Peter Pace; the disturbing pres-

ence of neo-Nazi skinhead extremists in military units, documented in July 2006 by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Is the military socially responsible? Traditionalists commonly argue that the military cannot afford to be a test bed for social experimentation. Nonetheless, as a major institution of society, the military is obligated to be socially responsible. That means, among other things, be-

ing demographically, experientially and ideologically representative of society. Today's military is not representative—at least in the sense that neither the country's political, economic and media elite nor their offspring serve in uniform.

Being socially responsible means being affordable. At a gluttonous cost of \$700 billion a year, more than the gross domestic product of all but 17 of the world's countries, the U.S. military clearly is not affordable—especially if the spurious notion that we are embroiled in an endless "long war" retains political traction.

Being socially responsible means being willing to dissent responsibly—to speak up and speak out—without open or surreptitious disobedience to proper military authority. The deeply ingrained ethos of obedience, the widespread careerist motivation to seek higher rank, the tendency to promote dutiful followers at the expense of assertive leaders, and the principle of political neutrality all have nurtured habits of unquestioning acquiescence among senior officers who should, but don't, exercise their responsibility for checking and balancing civilian strategic shortcomings.

Being socially responsible means being morally superior—walking the talk of moral propriety. Too many in uniform today are convinced that they are morally superior to an otherwise decadent society. But such moral arrogance is undeserved in light of the hundreds of incidents of aberrant behavior by military personnel each year. Military claims that episodes such as Abu Ghraib and Haditha are unrepresentative of an otherwise morally superior military simply do not hold up in the face of persistent evidence to the contrary.

The rest of the story

Beyond the foregoing, the U.S. military almost invariably precipitates rather than prevents crisis; feeds perceptions abroad of American arrogance and hypocrisy, while undermining U.S. credibility and legitimacy; threatens, in single-mindedly providing for the common defense, other important dimensions of security (liberty, justice, the general welfare); and permits

The U.S. military precipitates rather than prevents crisis and feeds perceptions abroad of American arrogance and hypocrisy, while undermining U.S. credibility and legitimacy.

itself to be an instrument for the militarization of U.S. foreign policy. In short, it is strategically dysfunctional.

Add to this the following, and it is indeed a recipe for crisis: consistently unsound strategic advice from senior military leaders; strategically inept civilian officials, executive and legislative, who have turned the hallowed principle of civilian control into civilian subjugation; a civically apathetic public that has acceded to uncompromising military demands for secrecy and failed to responsibly oversee the military's overseers; an uncritical press that has declined to exact transparency and accountability from the military and its overseers; a weak, fragmented civil society, typified by a largely moribund anti-war movement; and a military-industrial complex whose overweening influence on policy-makers and policies has fed militarism and corruption.

Given this state of affairs, no longer can we, the people, give a free pass to a military institution that expects unconditional appreciation, unequivocal support, unquestioning trust, unlimited discretionary license and the absence of "meddling" by "amateurs." Nor can we blindly trust those who profess to oversee the military on our behalf. The strategic price for doing so is one we cannot afford. ■

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THE UNIONS' MAN?

John Edwards does more than talk the talk on workers' issues, but will he walk away with labor's endorsement?

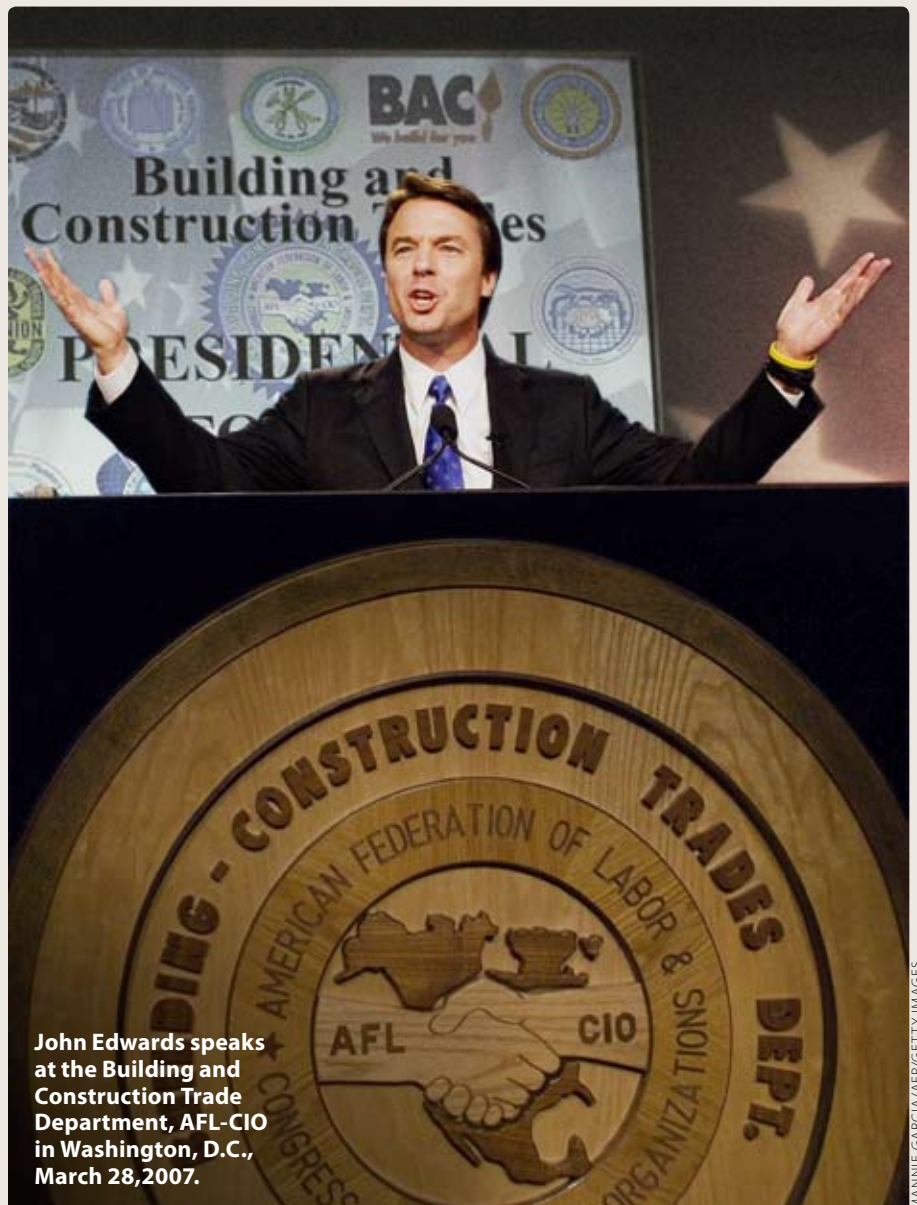
BY DAVID MOBERG

IOWA CITY, IOWA—DRESSED in gently faded jeans and a solid dark-blue sport shirt, John Edwards sauntered across the stage of the Northwest Junior High School auditorium on a hot Saturday morning in June, talking to a labor union audience that was warm to him from his opening words.

"My view is not that complicated," Edwards told the charter convention of Iowa's Change to Win labor federation in his polished but folksy manner. "If we want to strengthen and grow the middle class in this country, if we want to grow America economically, if we want to see millions of people lifted out of poverty, the organized labor movement is a critical component of that. That's the reason that wherever I am, I talk about making it easier to organize in the workplace, why that's important for lifting people out of poverty and to strengthen the middle class."

Politicians often praise unions at union halls, though rarely so effusively. But as a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, Edwards' rhetoric goes a couple of steps farther.

A few days before, at a trendy bar in the affluent Streeterville neighborhood in Chicago, Edwards told a group of mainly young Democratic business and professional people that America needed to strengthen the right to organize and create "democracy in the workplace." And an hour after his Change to Win appearance, he made essentially the same pitch to a crowd of several hundred potential Iowa caucus-



John Edwards speaks at the Building and Construction Trade Department, AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., March 28, 2007.

MANNIE GARCIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

goers in the sheep barn at the Johnson County Fairgrounds.

Edwards walks the talk as well, often on picket lines. The week after his swing through Iowa, he joined a rally at the giant Smithfield hog processing plant in his home state to demand that the company, a notorious labor law violator, recognize workers when a majority signs union cards. During the past two

the candidates as politically acceptable, even if Edwards has most clearly identified his candidacy with the labor movement. Yet even if they're divided, unions could still make a difference—if they don't cancel each other out: In the 2004 Iowa caucus, for example, Dick Gephardt and Howard Dean labor backers fought each other so brutally that both candidates suffered.

a stronger union message than, for example, Bill Clinton ever did. Hillary Clinton can tap into her ties to New York's huge union membership and union leaders' familiarity with her and her husband. Barack Obama has close ties to the big labor bloc from Illinois, sympathy from many black trade union members and a broad progressive appeal. Meanwhile, Edwards comes from

If the labor movement put its formidable ground operations behind Edwards it could lift him out of his current third place in the polls and give him a better shot at the nomination.

years, the Edwards campaign claims, the former senator and vice-presidential candidate has taken part in more than 200 different union events with more than 20 unions, including a national contract campaign tour for hotel workers, a fast with janitors organizing at the University of Miami and an airport rally in Texas for Continental Airlines ramp employees who were organizing.

"He's redefined the way public officials engage the ongoing work of the labor movement," says Chris Chafe, the former chief of staff of UNITE HERE and one of several labor officials with high-level positions in the Edwards campaign—not counting campaign manager David Bonior, the former staunchly pro-union congressman who previously headed American Rights at Work, a labor-rights advocacy group. "I don't think anyone has come so close in recent memory to putting himself so squarely behind issues central to the labor movement. We'd welcome institutional endorsements, but our goal is to have workers and union leaders focus on what he does as well as what he says."

If the labor movement put its formidable operations behind Edwards it could lift him out of his current third place in the polls and give him a better shot at the nomination. But odds are that unions will be divided. Some are so internally split that they may not be able to make an endorsement. Some will emphasize factors such as familiarity and electability since they see most of

Most unions are holding internal discussions, polling members, holding presidential forums and setting tests for candidates—such as the Service Employees' request that each candidate spend a day working with one of its members. (Edwards leapt to be first to take part in the "walk a day in my shoes" exercise.) In August, the AFL-CIO will host a candidates' debate in Chicago and then begin deliberations on a unified endorsement. Only two candidates have ever mustered the two-thirds support needed—Walter Mondale in 1984 and Al Gore in 2000. Although some labor strategists argue that Edwards could pass that bar, more observers agree with AFSCME Political Director Larry Scanlon that "it will be very hard for any candidate to amass the two-thirds for the AFL-CIO endorsement." Despite his close work with Change to Win unions, Edwards is no shoo-in for their endorsement either.

A hill to climb

Edwards faces several obstacles. Unlike recent primaries, when many union strategists complained about the unappealing choices they faced, this season "people talk about the quality of the candidates," says AFL-CIO Political Director Karen Ackerman. "All of the candidates have long-term relationships with lots of [union] members and leaders." Perhaps challenged by Edwards' early identification with labor, other candidates have developed

a state with nearly the nation's lowest union density, and in the 2004 primary he won only one endorsement, from the textile union UNITE.

"Labor generally likes Edwards in terms of what he says on the two Americas and labor," says Janice Laue, executive vice-president of the Iowa Federation of Labor, in the critical early caucus state where Edwards has led most recent polls. "On the other hand, you have Hillary Clinton, who, like Obama, has support from individuals in the labor movement. Her husband's popularity probably carries over a little too, not to say she isn't popular in her own right. And a lot of people think Obama represents diversity, a fresh face, and they like what he did at the Democratic convention. But the labor movement is about as split up among those three [leading candidates] as anybody else."

Ultimately, many unionists feel that Edwards is, as one official put it, "one of us." Despite his personal wealth, he is the son of a millworker who has made poverty and class divisions central to his campaign. He strikes many industrial unionists as the most sensitive of the top three candidates to their concerns about trade and globalization. And he's campaigned concretely and vigorously for universal health care, most recently proposing additional cost-control measures, such as making critical drugs available more promptly as generics and limiting private health insurance company overhead. "Lots of

people like John because he's talking about our issues every day," says Steelworkers Political Director Chuck Rocha. "Right now, he's making people in the labor movement feel important."

Unions, however, want to go with a winner (which is why so many offer Rep. Dennis Kucinich as an example of

who led the Democratic polling at this stage of the 2004 campaign. They say she will be dragged down by her persistently high negative ratings in polls and by identification with the conservative, business wing of the party at a time when economic populism and antiwar sentiment are growing stronger.

Bush tax cuts for households earning over \$200,000 a year, but he's cautious about advocating policies that would limit or redistribute the massive concentrations of wealth by the top 1 percent of taxpayers in recent years. For example, he has not endorsed Democratic congressional proposals to reverse the

Many unionists feel that Edwards is 'one of us.' Despite his personal wealth, he is the son of a millworker who has made poverty and class divisions central to his campaign.

someone who is right on nearly all the issues for labor but without a prayer for labor support). "What matters is who can win in '08," says Scanlon. "That's the driver." On that count, Roger Tauss, legislative and political director of the Transport Workers Union, notes that Rasmussen surveys have recently shown Edwards as the only Democrat to consistently outpoll all the top Republican nominees. "It is not true that Hillary can't win," he says. "Under certain conditions, any Democrat can win. But she has no margin for error."

Many labor strategists think that Obama will fade as the serious non-Hillary candidate and that Clinton's fate will be like that of Joe Lieberman's,

Choosing sides

Edwards advocates workplace democracy and the right to organize unions, but his message is directed not only to union members or officials, but also to the aspirations and frustrations of working- and middle-class voters. Sharing a theme with Obama, he tells audiences that electing a president can't solve the country's problems, that only a grassroots citizens' movement will bring real change.

Edwards remains the proverbial up-beat American politician, despite his talk about poverty. He has dropped the "two Americas" rhetoric from the last campaign in favor of a hope for "one America." He favors rolling back the

favorable tax treatment enjoyed by private-equity fund managers.

"I've said in the past that I'm open to the idea that for those with extreme wealth, like myself, that we may need to bear more responsibility," he said in an interview after his talk at the Johnson County Fairgrounds. "I haven't proposed anything yet. Speaking for myself, I still believe in a country of aspiration. We want to live in an America where people can do extraordinarily well. We just want to extend that opportunity to people who don't have it now. To me, it's more about opening up opportunity."

"Bush policies clearly accelerated economic growth of Americans at the top," he continued, "but there are global factors at work. If you're highly educated and have capital, you'll do great in the age of globalization. But unfortunately that has the effect of stratifying class. It makes it more difficult to go from one class to another. What we want to do is break down that stratification and create more fluidity between classes in America. There are lots of tools for doing that—universal health care, access to college, unionization, dealing with the public school system."

When his wife, Elizabeth, took the microphone to enthusiastic applause at the fairgrounds, she asked the audience to consider whether the candidates believed in some cause or simply in themselves as a leader. She suggested that the audience fill in the blank in a sentence using each candidate's name: "Gary Johnson," for example, wants to be president because he believes _____. And it's not enough if the blank is filled with the candidate's name. "John Edwards



Edwards speaks at a community meeting in Tipton, Iowa on June 16, 2007.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN EDWARDS

wants to be president,” she said, “because he believes the opportunities that were available to him should be available to every person.”

The message strikes a classical, if increasingly mythical theme of American mobility, but Edwards’ subtext conveys a strong egalitarian note and a hint of redistributive economics. Ultimately, he seems to understand that the country must become more equal in incomes and other real conditions of life in order to make equality of opportunity meaningful. Edwards also recognizes that creating equality of opportunity first requires redistributing power, which is why his support for unions is so critical for his strategy. Obama learned the same lesson early in his career as a community organizer, but his current campaign often overshadows that message of empowerment with its quest to find common ground in a new, less partisan Washington.

Edwards suggests that a political leader can—and should—take sides in that realignment of power. “What would it be like to have a president who spoke about the Employee Free Choice Act [legislation to make organizing easier that the House passed earlier this year, but Senate Republicans blocked in June]? Who spoke on the right to join a union?” Edwards asked the Change to Win meeting.

Against the American grain

Edwards’ populist message and his appeal to union members and many working- or middle-class voters goes beyond the questions of workplace democracy and equality of opportunity. His approach sets him apart from Hillary Clinton and Obama. But his ideas about a new energy policy, a new patriotism (not tied to war) and a new and respected role for America in the world do not dramatically distinguish him from the other Democratic candidates. Obama’s earlier and more principled opposition to the war in Iraq undercuts Edwards’ currently strong antiwar rhetoric. And so far, he has not sparked the same excitement as Obama’s campaign, raising the question of what might lift him out of his current lagging status in the top tier.

In many ways, Edwards is swimming against the stream, fighting the preconceptions of the mainstream American

political media, with his talk about alleviating poverty and building stronger unions. Yet that message is important for the Democrats and the country, whatever happens with the messenger’s candidacy.

“I think the American people need to be reminded that organized labor—unions—helped build the middle class in this country,” Edwards told the Change to Win crowd in Iowa. “We love to talk about the jobs that we’re

all worried are leaving the country, but those jobs weren’t good jobs before the unions. The unions made them good jobs with good pay and good benefits and helped build the middle class that made America great and literally made it the country of the 20th century. Now the question is how to make America the country of the 21st century, and you play a crucial role in that.”

Edwards clearly hopes they will help him play a leading role as well. ■

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The Subprime Bait and Switch

Under the guise of extending home ownership to all, predatory lenders undermine community reinvestment

BY ALEXANDER GOURSE

WHEN THE HOUSING MARKET began its rapid ascent in the mid-'90s, many observers waxed rhapsodic about the potential of high-interest, subprime loans to merge the financial interests of investors and low income and minority communities. The hope for subprime boosters was that such loans would allow the mortgage industry to continue business as usual while at the same time meeting government mandates for fair and affordable housing. As recently as April 2005, Alan Greenspan praised the deregulation of the banking and lending industries for having "vastly expanded credit availability to virtually all income classes."

It's true that the number of minority homeowners increased at a similar rate to that of all homeowners during the last decade, but the housing market's recent slump has brought to light serious weaknesses in the subprime model, raising

doubts about its viability as a tool for community reinvestment. The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that Greenspan's zeal for deregulation may have caused him to turn a blind eye to predatory practices within the subprime lending industry, and consumer advocates are now predicting that nearly 20 percent of subprime mortgage loans made since 2005 will end in foreclosure, at a loss to the consumer of around \$164 billion.

The home mortgage industry divides would-be borrowers into two basic types. Prime borrowers are those who have adequate income and good credit histories. Subprime borrowers are those with problematic credit histories and, often, less-than-adequate incomes. The loans are inherently risky for the lender, as such borrowers are more likely to default on payments, requiring higher interest rates to offset this risk.

Before the mid-'90s, subprime lenders

operated on a limited scale, but the rapid growth in the housing market brought with it more mortgage companies that specialized in subprime lending. The subprime industry grew from a \$35 billion per year industry in 1994 to more than \$330 billion in 2003, and from 2004 to 2006 the volume of subprime loans nearly doubled to more than \$600 billion.

"These loans keep being made because investors make a profit," says Geoff Smith, research director at the Woodstock Institute, a Chicago-based nonprofit that specializes in issues of community economic development. "Investors can tolerate a certain number of losses, because failures are priced into the risk assessment. As long as investors are still profiting, mortgage companies will do whatever they can to make more loans, and to maximize the total sums loaned out."

While industry representatives have

lauded their own success in offering credit to financially underserved populations, recent studies suggest that subprime loans have only a marginal effect on homeownership rates. Original purchase loans comprise only a small portion of subprime mortgages, and an even smaller percentage—about 9 percent—go to first-time homebuyers. A majority of subprime loans are refinances, with homeowners looking to lower their monthly payments or to draw out the equity in their homes to pay off their consumer debt or other personal expenses. If foreclosure rates continue to rise as predicted, the Center for Responsible Lending estimates that though some people will become first time homeowners due to subprime loans, there will be significantly more borrowers that will lose their homes to foreclosure.

Industry representatives typically cite the poor credit histories of most subprime borrowers to explain increasing foreclosure rates. Consumer and community advocates, however, paint a darker picture. “Predatory lending is definitely a systemic problem within the subprime mortgage industry,” says Al Hofeld Jr., a litigation attorney and chair of the South Side Community Federal Credit Union in Chicago (SS-CFU). “There are very few subprime lenders who will make a subprime loan where the interest rate actually reflects the risk involved.”

According to Smith, predatory lenders put borrowers into loans that they cannot afford. While blatant fraud, such as the falsification of a borrower’s income to justify a larger loan, is becoming less common, the misrepresentation of a loan’s characteristics, like the concealment of a fixed rate “teaser” period that adjusts upward after two years, is a growing problem.

Hofeld says subprime mortgage companies routinely use bait-and-switch tactics to lure in potential borrowers and maximize the amount of money loaned out. At closing, borrowers are often presented with terms that do not match those previously offered by the company, and then pressured into signing documents which they have not had time to review. Ameriquest Mortgage Company is currently facing hundreds of lawsuits which allege that they routinely baited potential customers by promising fixed interest rates, low or no fees, lower monthly payments, no pre-

payment penalties, or by representing to borrowers that they qualify for a particular set of terms.

In 2005, Betty and Tyrone Walker, a couple living in the Park Manor neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, took out a refinance loan with Ameriquest. “All we wanted to do was to make our house more livable,” says Walker, who is legally disabled and is raising a 12-year-old adopted daughter on her husband’s salary as a mail clerk at a local medical school. After being solicited by Ameriquest through the mail, the Walkers decided to use some of the equity in their home to refurnish their basement.

The Walkers requested information about the loan numerous times, and were confident that they knew what the terms of the loan would be when they went to sign the closing documents. “We just kept asking them whether we were going to remain on a fixed rate, and they just kept lying to us, telling us we’d get a fixed rate,” Mrs. Walker alleges in a lawsuit against Ameriquest.

As they later discovered, however, the terms of the loan were not as they expected. Not only did the loan have an adjustable rate that can go as high as 13.4 percent, but the Walkers allege that Ameriquest falsely told them that their home had doubled in value since they had bought it a few years earlier, thus qualifying them for a larger loan amount. Ameriquest didn’t give them copies of their loan documents at closing, and as a result the Walkers did not realize that the terms had been changed until well after the three-day period during which they could legally cancel the loan. They have since tried to refinance, but have been unable to find another lender willing to lend them the amount currently owed to Ameriquest; the artificially inflated appraisal value has in effect trapped them in a loan with a rising interest rate.

“I felt so stupid after I realized that I had been taken advantage of,” says Walker. “I made them a lunch! I’m always cooking, so I offered them food. I thought they were doing such a swell job of helping us that I cooked for these people, oh lord.”

The race factor

The Walkers’ story is all too familiar. Predatory lending is a particularly widespread problem in low-income and minority communities, where a complex history

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of housing discrimination, racial segregation and a lack of access to affordable credit have left borrowers with few options. Though redlining, blockbusting and other discriminatory practices were banned in stages between 1968 and 1977, most banks are reluctant to open branches in black neighborhoods, a vacuum that is filled by currency exchanges, payday lenders and now subprime mortgage companies.

“Subprime lenders,” says Smith, “are taking advantage of the fact that they’re the only game in town.” Individual bro-

kers and loan officers make money by taking “points”—that is, charging percentage points of the loan amount, which are added to the borrower’s closing costs—giving them an incentive to maximize the loan amount, regardless of the borrower’s ability to pay for it.

According to “Paying More for the American Dream,” a joint report from six national housing policy organizations, in 2005, black borrowers were 3.8 times more likely than whites to be placed in a high cost loan, while Hispanic borrowers were 3.6 times more likely than whites to receive such a loan. Income disparities between white and minority communities account for some of this difference, but Smith says the disparity is too large to be accounted for by income alone. Low-income black borrowers in the Chicago area were four times as likely to be put in high cost loans than low-income white borrowers.

But the largest disparity was in the highest income bracket, where blacks were five times as likely as whites to be placed in a high cost loan. Foreclosure rates in heavily minority neighborhoods across the nation follow these trends, with black and Latino neighborhoods experiencing significantly higher foreclosure rates than their white counterparts.

Regulation and alternatives

Consumer fraud laws, including requirements that lenders disclose the terms of a loan and borrowers’ cancellation rights, have been important tools for attorneys fighting predatory lenders. But with thousands of lawsuits filed on behalf of subprime borrowers across the country, many consumer advocates are calling for government regulation of the subprime industry.

“Ideally, what we need is a federal law to make sure lenders are using appropriate qualifying standards so that borrowers can repay the loans,” says Smith. Groups like the Center for Responsible Lending have also supported a ban on prepayment penalties and a reform of the “perverse compensation incentives” for “hazardous” loan products.

Congress however is unlikely to pass comprehensive legislation that deals with predatory lending, says Smith. “Realistically, we should be focusing on the state laws currently under debate.” In

1999, North Carolina was the first state to regulate predatory lending practices and dozens of other states and municipalities have followed suit. This year alone legislation dealing with subprime and predatory lending has been introduced in 26 states.

Hofeld, however, sees regulation as only a partial solution. “Some of the laws regulating predatory lenders could

At closing, subprime borrowers are often presented with terms that do not match those previously offered, and then pressured into signing documents they have not had time to review.

be improved, but some of the problems we see are very difficult to regulate. You can’t control what salespeople tell prospective borrowers.”

What’s more, warnings from the mortgage industry that regulation will cut off credit to low income and minority neighborhoods have created a panic among some community leaders and politicians. In Illinois, a bill mandating credit counseling for borrowers in several Chicago zip codes was suspended due to fears that it was racist and would slow real estate sales in those areas.

The seemingly no-win choice between disinvestment in low-income communities or allowing predatory lenders to operate freely might not be as bleak as it appears. A network of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) has emerged in some cities, providing affordable financial services to low-income individuals who might otherwise be prime targets for predatory lenders. Although their resources are limited, such institutions offer an alternative model for low-income community development.

“Our biggest problem is one of scale,” Hofeld says about the SSCFU. “We want to get to the point where we have a large enough number of deposits so that we’re making enough loans to be self sufficient.”

With around 1,800 members and \$3 million in assets, the SSCFU serves 33 neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago with a population of approximately 854,000 people. A self-described “financial institution with a social mission,” the SSCFU is one of approximately 225 members of the Na-

tional Federation of Community Development Credit Unions, a national organization working to establish a financial infrastructure in poor communities and empower low-income people through asset development.

While much of the capital required to operate the SSCFU has come from foundations and member deposits, federal money has been important as well.

Established in 1994, the CDFI Fund within the Treasury Department has made resources available for community development to credit unions, banks and microenterprise funds.

“The CDFI Fund really is the single largest source of funding for these institutions,” says Cliff Rosenthal, the executive director for the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions. “Though they can grow slowly on their own, the Fund is the only source of major investment that allows these institutions to make quantum leaps in their work.”

Since the Bush administration took office, however, the CDFI Fund has decreased by more than 50 percent. As a result, not only is funding harder to come by, but the maximum grants awarded by the Fund have decreased from around \$3 million to \$585,000.

Despite the lack of resources, community development credit unions like the SSCFU are proving that the usurious practices of predatory lenders are not a necessary evil in the fight for fair and affordable housing.

“The problems in the subprime mortgage industry should be framed as an affordable housing issue,” says Hofeld. “We often compartmentalize the way we think about issues, but I really think that predatory lending is something that is decreasing the supply of affordable housing. And the lack of access to mortgage credit on fair terms is something that prevents people from getting into homes.” ■

ALEXANDER GOURSE is a Chicago-based writer who is starting his doctorate in American history at Northwestern University this fall.

Tranche Warfare

Who will be left holding the bag as subprime mortgages go bad?

BY DAVID MULCAHEY

NOW THAT THE REAL estate bubble seems poised to go the way of its dot-com predecessor, a new narrative has taken hold in the business press. Where once reporters breathlessly touted double-digit, year-on-year gains in home prices, they now warn darkly of the “meltdown” underway in the class of exotic mortgages that added so much punch to the party.

After months of dismal reports for the real estate industry—declining sales, rising inventories, softening prices, rising foreclosure rates—the news took a sharp turn for the worse in late June, when the investment bank Bear Stearns shut down two hedge funds whose holdings were laden with securities backed by subprime mortgages.

Suddenly, finance pundits and insiders were speculating about just how far the damage of bad subprime loans would spread. Could it be “contained”? Were more hedge funds on the verge of implosion? Was the debacle about to touch off a system-wide credit crunch?

Meanwhile, a bemused public was wondering what the rarefied world of hedge funds had to do a bunch of poor suckers who had bought more house than they could afford. How many of these loans could there be—and how many defaults—that a Wall Street powerhouse like Bear Stearns was taking it on the chops? And what’s the story behind all these subprime loans, anyway? Whose idea was all that funky lending?

The insiders’ questions have yet to be answered. But for financial naifs, the Bear Stearns imbroglio was highly instructive. It briefly pulled back the curtain to reveal the machinations behind the mountain of

mortgage debt the American peasantry has piled up during the great housing bubble. Subprime lending in the United States rose from \$35 billion annually in 1994 to \$625 billion in 2005. A shocking proportion of this financing was extended on the flimsiest pretenses of due diligence by lenders, and carried terms and conditions sure to ruin a large number of borrowers. According to Fannie Mae, between \$1.1 and \$2.2

paper nowadays is instantly sold, and the buyers are the big Wall Street investment banks, which repackage it as mortgage-backed securities and various “structured finance” products (such as the gizmo that got Bear Stearns into trouble, the “collateralized debt obligation” or CDO). The point of “securitizing” home loans is easy enough to understand: It takes an illiquid obligation—Joe Doaks’ mortgage—and, by pooling it with similar debt, transforms it into a fungible, liquid security that can be rated for creditworthiness and sold to institutional investors.

Many institutional investors, such as pension funds, mutual funds, insurance companies and so forth, are restricted from buying debt unless it’s investment-grade—that is, debt with a rating of BBB or better (the rating expresses default risk, not value). And here is where the genius of structured-finance products like CDOs comes into play. These securities can pool quite unsavory debt—subprime mortgages, for example—and repackage it in ways so that at least some of it will be suitable for the more choosy investors mentioned above.

They do this by dividing the pool into segments, called tranches. The senior tranche might carry the highest rating (AAA), while the “mezzanine” tranche carries AA to BBB. The lowest segment, the so-called equity tranche, is typically unrated. Again, the entire pool might be made up of shaky loans—downright dodgy ones, in fact—but the senior tranche may still merit the AAA rating because it always claims priority of payment. It gets the first dollar of cash flow, while the lowest tranche takes the first dollar of loss. Because most borrowers—even subprime



trillion in adjustable-rate mortgages will reset to higher rates in 2007. Another \$1.4 to \$2.4 trillion will reset in 2008—half of it subprime and another quarter less than prime. It’s difficult to see how that will end well. Yet for a while, the bubble seemed like some millennial, never-ending win-win scenario.

By now it should be apparent to most Americans that we’re beyond the George Bailey model of mortgage lending, in which banks and other mortgage lenders hold on to the loans they write. Most mortgage

ones—pay their mortgages, money managers can buy AAA tranches with a relative degree of confidence.

Theoretically, that is. But more about that in a moment.

The other great thing about CDOs was that they typically carried higher yields than similarly rated bonds and other securities. Investors, not surprisingly, developed quite an appetite for them—so much so that mortgage brokers could not write mortgage loans fast enough. Future historians inquiring into the strange phenomenon of the stated-income (or “liar”) loan should begin by looking here.

But what about the risk? Didn’t anybody think about the risk?

In a word, no. Chalk it up to the bubble sweet spot—excellent economic conditions, plus cheap and plentiful credit. Under classic bubble conditions, so-called “risk premium”—i.e., the return investors expect for putting their capital at risk—tends to dwindle. Investments can’t seem to go wrong, money’s easy to borrow, confidence is high, so investors willingly take on more risk in their portfolios for less reward.

But with CDOs, a great deal of risk appears to have been hidden from view. For example, questions have been raised about the accuracy of their ratings. Moody’s, Standard and Poor’s and the other agencies that traditionally have made their money charging debt issuers a fee for rating their bonds, decided a few years ago to—how to put it?—change their business model. They started to work much more closely with the Wall Street firms in creating these wonderful new securities, to the point where they were for all intents and purposes part of an underwriting team. They were paid accordingly. Net income at Moody’s, to cite one example, increased from \$159 million in 2000 to \$705 million in 2006, according to *Fortune*, thanks largely to their forays into structured finance.

Things get pretty murky from an ethical standpoint when a credit-rating company has such an obvious financial interest in the creditworthiness of the securities it’s rating. That conflict of interest came into high relief as the Bear Stearns crisis unwound. “Standard & Poor’s, Moody’s Investors Service and Fitch Ratings are masking burgeoning losses in the market for subprime mortgage bonds by failing to cut the credit ratings on about \$200 billion of securities backed by home loans,” reported Bloomberg shortly after bad hedge trades got one

of the Bear funds in trouble,

As was widely reported, creditors of the Bear Stearns High-Grade Structured Credit Fund seized \$800 million of the fund’s collateral and began auctioning it off. But Bear management pledged \$3.2 billion of the firm’s capital to stop the auction when it became clear that those securities were likely to sell at a hefty discount.

The greatest boom in property values since record-keeping began has produced a population more in debt, and with less equity, than before it all got going.

In other words, a fire sale on AAA-rated, subprime-backed CDOs was not going to be good for business going forward, as the securities ratings would certainly come under suspicion.

“Downgrades by S&P, Moody’s and Fitch,” Bloomberg explained, “would force hundreds of investors to sell holdings, roiling the \$800 billion market for securities backed by subprime mortgages and \$1 trillion of collateralized debt obligations, the fastest growing part of the financial markets.” CDO business would dry up, possibly causing mortgage lending to contract, creating more havoc in the housing market. The virtuous circle that created the bubble might then be reversed, leading to more defaults and still lower real estate prices.

If subprime-backed securities do indeed “melt down,” who will be covered in goo? Right now, that’s anybody’s guess. Some speculate that hedge funds are hugely freighted with toxic subprime waste, and that a rolling implosion is in the offing. Others point out that any pain will be spread generally throughout the financial sector, including to insurance companies, pension funds, even boring old mutual funds. A credit crunch is possible, which in turn raises the specter of recession (or, for those who argue a recession has already started, tight credit could deepen its severity). At that point, consequences for consumer spending, for the stock market and for the dollar would be anybody’s guess.

On the other hand, holders of subprime debt may just muddle through. CDOs, for example, are not very liquid, nor is it easy to assess their risk. But those who can afford to hold onto them—at least

the higher-rated tranches—could emerge almost whole. The lesson of this recent brush with mortality is that we now live in a world where liquidity can go away. All that stupid money can vaporize, and we won’t even know what caused it.

Hopefully, the unfortunate events at Bear Stearns will add a new wrinkle to the journalistic morality tale about subprime

lending. For months we’ve been treated to all manner of scoundrels and fools. Greedy, dissembling lenders preying on the ignorance of poor homeowners. Greedy, dissembling borrowers who tried to ride the boom for too long. Feckless suckers who can’t look out for their own good. Choose your favorite narrative—they’re all true!

But now it may be time to examine how the promise of the bubble turned into its opposite. The greatest boom in property values since record-keeping began has produced a population more in debt, and with less equity, than before it all got going. Alan Greenspan and other puffers of the late bubble hasten to point out that the mortgage industry’s liberality with subprime borrowers extended the American dream to a class of people who otherwise would have been shut out. That’s true enough, anecdotally. It has also converted a huge amount of unsecured household debt into secured debt—not a good place to be if the family finances go pear-shaped.

The bubble has driven people in desperation to chase spiraling home prices with stagnant wages. And those lucky enough—or foolish enough—to have stretched their finances to the breaking point now face the real possibility of being trapped in an upside-down mortgage.

Maybe the American middle class faces an indefinite future of being strapped, waiting for inflation to ease their burden. That’s a best-case scenario, and it’s not very good. I’m not so sanguine. A reckoning is on its way. And there’s an old saw on Wall Street that, in times of panic, money returns to its rightful owners. Let’s not have any delusions as to who that might be. ■

RISKING **EVERYTHING** FOR EUROPE

Industrial fishing off the African coast ruins livelihoods and sends fishermen on a perilous journey across desert and sea

BY HANS LUCHT

BEFORE SETTING OUT ACROSS the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Italy, the Ghanaian human traffickers who had hired Samuel and his two friends to captain the boat in exchange for their passage warned them not to sail with more than 90 immigrants aboard—nor to trust the Libyan police.

But under the cover of night, when a freezer truck delivered them to the beach they realized that corrupt local cops had filled the leaky, stolen fishing boat with more than 100 sub-Saharan Africans. Samuel and his friends, fishermen from a coastal village in Ghana, were responsible for reaching European shores, alive.

What were they to do now?

“If the sun rose and we were discovered, who knows what problems could have arisen,” says Samuel, whose name was changed to protect his identity.

Samuel is one of the tens of thousands of Africans who have sought to reach Italy by boat in recent years. Last year about 22,000 immigrants arrived on Italy’s shores—primarily the islands of Lampedusa and Sicily—close to double the number from 2004. Though more illegal immigrants enter Italy through the country’s northern border with Slovenia—which is used as an entry point for those from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the

rest of Asia—the leaky boats from North Africa draw the most attention. And the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean follows an even deadlier journey through the Sahara Desert to reach North Africa.

Samuel comes from Senya Beraku, a village of about 12,500 on the Gulf of Guinea, about an hour drive west of the capital, Accra. Fishing was once the dominant industry there, but fish off the Atlantic coast are disappearing at an alarming rate. Experts suggest several causes for the fishing industry’s plight. The fishermen use nets with holes that are too small, or catch fish with electric lights and dynamite—unsustainable

Young men from the Ghanaian village of Senya Beraku participate in a fishing ritual.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANS LUCHT

practices that exhaust fish populations. In addition, the growing coastal population has put pressure on the food supply. But central to the problem are the industrial trawlers subsidized by the European Union, primarily from Spain, which has acquired fishing rights off West African territorial waters. And industrial fishing greatly affects the catch closer to shore that the local communities rely on for survival.

European trawlers now fish off the coasts of nine West African countries—from Morocco in the north to Gabon in the south—a development criticized by the United Nations as well as environmental organizations like Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund, which question the sustainability of the practice.

In April 2006, Greenpeace observed and intercepted a Spanish trawler, the *Binar 4*, en route to Las Palmas in the Canary Islands after illegally fishing within the territorial waters of Guinea. The trawler intended to sell its catch at Las Palmas, which Greenpeace calls the “fish laundering capital of the world.”

“Some say the lull is natural, and that the fish will come back at some point, but this is now the third year in a row that we aren’t catching enough fish,” says Chief Mortey, who presides over Senya Beraku’s fishing industry.

The fishermen typically leave at daybreak. Between five and six in the morning, the sounds of outboard motors from the beach pierce every ear in the village before the fishermen jump, 20 per boat, into their large painted canoes. But whereas they were once able to remain in the bay, Senya Beraku’s fishermen now go farther out to sea. Skyrocketing gas prices haven’t made their lives any easier, and many crews travel around with serious gasoline debt hanging over their heads.

In the afternoon the canoes return from the ocean. But even before they have reached land, the villagers can see that the fishermen have returned empty-handed. “They sit and hang their heads,” explains Mortey. “If they have a good catch, you’d see them standing up and cheering in the canoe. But there hasn’t been much cheering lately.”

Mortey has tried to convince the village’s youth not to risk their lives to reach Europe, but several of them have returned from Italy with enough money saved to build a house or buy a car, and that kind of wealth impresses the other fishermen.



Mortey, the fishing chief in Senya Beraku, tries to dissuade young Ghanaian men from attempting the risky journey across the Sahara and the Mediterranean to Italy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HANS LUCHT

Death in the desert

The trip from Ghana to Europe begins with a journey across the Sahara Desert that those from the coastal areas fear. Out on the high seas fishermen believe they can deal with whatever goes wrong, but in the desert they feel helpless.

The trip from Accra to Tripoli that Samuel and his friends endured is almost 1,900 miles long and takes about a month. It crosses Burkina Faso, Niger and sometimes Algeria. The first part of the journey—by bus, to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, and then onto Niamey, the capital of Niger—is usually problem-free. Then it gets tough. The border areas of northern Niger, Algeria, Libya and Chad are notoriously unsafe. The caravans of people headed for Europe are easy targets for the armed bandits that patrol this desolate region.

“I don’t cry easily,” says Samuel. “I didn’t cry when my sister died. But I cried in the desert. I was sure that we would all die.”

Samuel left Dirkou, the last city in Niger before the Sahara, in a caravan consisting of four trucks with around 30 people packed in each. He had convinced Martin, a friend from their village in Ghana, to join him on the journey. But somewhere in the desert, their

driver abandoned Samuel, Martin and 28 other passengers, driving away early one morning with all of their water and food while they lay on the ground sleeping. They quickly got up and ran to one of the other four-wheeled trucks in the caravan that hadn’t left yet. They tried to climb aboard before the truck drove off—but it was filled to the brim with other immigrants. The driver promised he would return and get them once he’d driven his own passengers to the border. But he didn’t keep his promise. Dejected, Samuel and the others began wandering across the Sahara.

“We didn’t know which direction to go,” says Samuel. “So we followed the tire tracks in the sand. But the people weren’t strong enough and they began to fall down—the old ones first. We walked day and night, but quickly ran out of water and were forced to begin drinking our own urine, which we mixed with sugar. We were around 30 people when we began to walk, but it didn’t take long before there were only eight of us left. The weakest ones asked us to wait for them, but we couldn’t wait for anyone, otherwise we would all die.

“At one point while we lay and rested, one guy suddenly got up and said he could see a city in the distance. He

walked three steps and fell back into the sand. It was as if he found new strength just before he died. The rest of us continued to walk, and the next day at around six in the evening we met a car that helped us with food and water. The only passengers still alive were Martin, myself and two other young guys. We were very lucky to survive that journey.”

They finally reached Libya, found their way to Tripoli and began looking for a connection to Europe.

“We met a few others from our home village. Because of the desert sun we were very dark and the skin had fallen from our bodies. They looked at us and asked what had happened. We answered that we had died but come back to life.”

Danger on the high sea

Once in Tripoli, Samuel and his friends made a deal with a Ghanaian smuggler who put them up in a house in Zuwarah, a Libyan port city near the Tunisian border, from which illegal immigrants cross to Europe. They agreed that Samuel and his friends would captain the boat to Lampedusa in exchange for their passage. The smugglers wanted a good crew because they feared business would be lost if too many of their boats disappeared at sea. Rumors of capsized boats and drowned immigrants circulate quickly among the Africans looking for passage to Italy.

The amount of money at stake is not small. A ticket to Europe costs around \$1,000 per person, making Samuel and other West African fishermen valuable commodities to the human traffickers. During their time in Zuwarah, the smugglers offered Samuel and his friends whatever food and drinks they wanted, and even tempted them with prostitutes.

A week later they learned that they were to leave for Italy that very night. The Ghanaians began to fast and pray. One of the captains, Eric, a tall fisherman who was religious and versed in the Bible, took the confessions of the others. Nothing was to stand in the way of a safe journey.

Samuel knew that 12 young men from his village had already disappeared at sea, and hundreds of passengers with them. Samuel believed the deaths could have been caused by bad weather or poor equipment—as it’s well known among captains that Libyan human smugglers

show them one boat in the daylight, but when they return to the beach at night for the departure, it’s been switched for a leaky version that is already overflowing with passengers.

When he reached the beach and saw the boat he was to sail across the Medi-

would capsize and we would all drown. Some of the passengers wouldn’t listen. They said we didn’t know what we were doing. So I asked an older man among them to keep order, and he convinced them to sit back down.”

Forty-eight hours later, they reached

‘At one point while we lay and rested, one guy suddenly got up and said he could see a city in the distance. He walked three steps and fell back into the sand. It was as if he found new strength just before he died.’

terranean, Samuel grimaced. “I was afraid. I thought, ‘Oh God, what have I done?’ I thought of all the people whose lives were now in my hands. But we didn’t want to show anyone that we were afraid, so we tried to remain cheerful and keep our heads up. I told them just to wait and see. I would make them European this very year.”

The human smugglers escorted them out to sea in their speedboat and reminded Samuel to follow the compass, then turned around and disappeared into the dark. The boat headed straight for Italy—a journey that would take about 24 hours if everything went according to plan. Even though the motor was poor, they moved slowly forward, passing Libya’s offshore oilrig platforms with Malta on the starboard side and Tunis on the port side. Samuel knew that the key to a safe journey was to avoid panic. If passengers began to move around, the boat might capsize.

“When I looked over the side to see what condition the boat was in, I saw that it sat so deep in the water that I couldn’t see anything other than the passengers,” Samuel says. “Water kept coming in over the railing and we had to begin bailing it out.

“All went well early on, and the passengers remained calm. One passenger declared that he would take sleeping pills and fall asleep—if the boat went down he would die without suffering.

“But when we got out to sea and the waves grew larger, people began to move around. They refused to sit where water was entering the boat. It was a very dangerous situation. I told them that if they didn’t sit back in their seats, the boat

the harbor of Lampedusa, the small Italian cliff island 190 miles north of Libya. Samuel and his friends had survived the journey to Europe. And back in Senya Beraku, another wave of Ghanaian fishermen was beginning to look north. ■

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Illegal Immigrants: Uncle Sam Wants You

Latino teenagers, including illegal immigrants, are being recruited into the military with false promises

BY DEBORAH DAVIS

IN 1996, JESUS ALBERTO Suarez del Solar was a 13-year-old boy, up from Tijuana on a family shopping trip, when he stopped at a Marine Corps recruiting table at an open-air mall in Chula Vista, Calif.

Jesus had been an easy mark for the recruiter—a boy who fantasized that by joining the powerful, heroic U.S. Marines, he could help his own country fight drug lords. He gave the recruiter his address and phone number in Mexico, and the recruiter called him twice a week for the next two years, until he had talked Jesus into convincing his parents to move to California. Fernando and Rose Suarez sold their home and their laundry business and immigrated with their children to Escondido, where Jesus enrolled at a high school known for academic achievement. But the recruiter wanted him to transfer to a school for problem teenagers, since its requirements for graduation were lower and Jesus would be able to finish sooner. He was 17 and a half when he graduated from that school, still too young to enlist on his own, so his father co-signed the enlistment form, as the military requires for underage recruits.

Three years later, at the age of 20, his body was torn apart in Iraq by an American-made fragmentation grenade during the first week of the invasion. In the Pentagon's official Iraq casualty database, his death is number 74.

Now Jesus is in a cemetery in Escondido, and his parents, who blame each other for his death, are painfully and bitterly divorced. While his mother bears her loss as a private tragedy, Fernando, who has dual Mexican and American citizenship, is working tirelessly to protect other young immigrants from being manipulated by U.S. military recruiters—the way he wishes he had protected his son.

In the Iraq war, citizenship is being used as a recruiting tool aimed specifically at young immigrants, who are told that by



Fernando Suarez del Solar of Escondido, Calif., stands next to a picture of his son, U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Jesus Suarez, during a press conference Aug. 13, 2003 in Washington, D.C. Suarez died March 27, 2003 in Iraq.

enlisting, they will be able to quickly get citizenship for themselves (sometimes true, depending on what the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) branch of the Department of Homeland Security finds) and their entire families (not true; each family member has to go through a separate application process). Nevertheless, with the political pressures on Latino families growing daily under this administration, many young Latinos are unable to resist the offer, which immigrants' rights activists see as blatant exploitation of a vulnerable population.

From African American to Latino

Jesus, like the large majority of new military recruits, was signed up through the Delayed Entry Program (DEP), which operates in high schools, GED programs and home-schooling networks across the nation. The well-crafted messages on the DEP website have been in development

ever since the draft ended and the all-volunteer military was initiated after Vietnam. The DEP's persuasion campaigns originally targeted black teenagers with the message that military service equaled jobs that promised equal treatment regardless of race. DEP recruiters were able to easily meet their quotas until the early '80s, when enlistment rates of young African Americans began to decline and the rates for Latinos began to rise for reasons the military did not understand. A 1995 article in *Marketing Science*, "The Navy Enlistment Marketing Experiment," noted that "a surprising development was the emergence of the Hispanic population as an important variable contributing to the pool of ... contracts. Further investigation of the phenomenon is warranted."

Over the next decade, the military commissioned a number of studies on the relationship between race and ethnicity and the "propensity to enlist." For example, the

Youth Attitude Tracking Survey, conducted between 1975 and 1999 and published by the Defense Technical Information Center, found a correlation between the rising educational achievement of blacks and lower enlistment rates; and between the low educational achievement of Latinos (particularly if their first language was not English) and rising enlistment rates. As Latinos became a more important source of recruits, the Pentagon hired market research firms to design advertising campaigns that addressed the issues they cared most about—pride in family, children in school and citizenship.

Today, the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force recruitment campaigns focus largely on education and benefits to families. The Army's campaign, created by Cartel Impacto, a cutting-edge firm from San Antonio, uses the firm's proprietary "barrio anthropology" and grassroots "viral and guerilla marketing" techniques to "go deep into the neighborhoods and barrios" in order to tell Latino families how the military can help them have the kind of life they want in America. "We address the core issues of why they left their country in the first place," says a Cartel Impacto spokesperson, who did not want her name published. "You have to conduct your outreach carefully," she says, "using PTAs as an entry point," as well as "local Hispanic groups that the newly arrived would look to."

Recruit friends, earn bucks

These marketing campaigns support the work of recruiters who—as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act—must have free access to students in every one of the country's public schools. Recruiters operating in high schools try to get children as young as 14 to sign up for the military's DEP, which allows them to finish high school before going on active duty. Under the program, these young "men and women," as recruiters are trained to call them, are targeted, tested, gifted, video-gamed, recruitment-faired and career-counseled into enlisting before they turn 18. They are also paid \$2,000 for every friend they talk into signing up with them, and, until recently, were paid \$50 for every name they brought in to a recruiter. The DEP website provides tips on how students can assist recruiters in signing up their friends. The student can:

- Provide your recruiter with names and numbers of anyone you know who is considering joining the military.

- Obtain the names and numbers of people who work with you or attend places you frequent and the best time to talk to them.
- Obtain the names and numbers of friends or acquaintances who sit with you in classes.
- Help your recruiter by screening his/her lists.
- Accompany your recruiter to places your friends normally hang out and make introductions.

In addition to cash, students who help recruiters to enlist their friends are promoted to a higher military rank, from Private E-1 to Private E-2, even before they are out of high school. The rewards are commensurate with the quality of the friends they recruit, as measured by their friends' ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) scores. "You will get promoted to Private E-2," promises the DEP website, if your referrals lead to the enlistment of "one soldier who scores 50 or higher on the ASVAB," or "two soldiers who score 31-49." Private E-1s are paid \$1,301 a month, while E-2s earn \$1,458 per month. Further, getting a second high-scoring friend or two more low-scoring friends to enlist earns the student another promotion, to Private E-3, and kicks the entry pay up to \$1,534 per month.

Another way DEPs can earn extra money is to volunteer for hazardous duty. Students who sign up to be in a combat unit, or to dismantle explosives, or to handle toxic chemicals, get an additional \$150 per month on top of their basic pay. *Volunteering* for hazardous duty, however, is a relative concept. Since DEP recruits do not, by definition, have a college education, there are few other military occupations open to them, except if their ASVAB scores are high enough for them to qualify for advanced training. But with the greatest need in this war being combat soldiers—so much so that even highly trained Air Force personnel are being sent to work with Army ground troop units—the chances of any DEP recruit getting out of combat duty and its attendant hazards are slim. The ASVAB is also administered only in English; and any job requiring even a security clearance cannot be held by a non-citizen. The implications of these conditions for young immigrants can be deadly.

The Department of Defense's casualty database (<http://icasualties.org>) doesn't publicly break down the dead and injured by ethnic group, but a tally of Latino sur-

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names found that between January 10 when the surge began and July 1, 20 percent of the 174 young people (aged 18-21) who died were likely to have been Latino (the military does not keep public data on the race or ethnicity of casualties). With the intensification of DEP recruiting efforts in largely Latino high schools since the invasion began, this is no surprise.

Legal illegals vs. illegal illegals

How many of these young Latino recruits are illegal immigrants? "Nobody knows," says Flavia Jimenez, an immigration policy analyst at the National Council of La Raza. "But what we do know is that recruiters may not be up to speed on everybody's legal status. ... We also know that a significant number of [illegals] have died in Iraq." The recruitment of illegal immigrants is particularly intense in Los Angeles, where 75 percent of the high school students are Latino. "A lot of our students are undocumented," says Arlene Inouye, a teacher at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, "and it's common knowledge that recruiters offer green cards." Inouye is the coordinator and founder of the Coalition Against Militarism in Our Schools (CAMS), a counter-recruitment organization that educates teenagers about deceptive recruiting practices. "The practice is pretty widespread all over the nation," she says, "especially in California and Texas. ... The recruiters tell them, 'you'll be helping your family.'"

Inouye referred me to Salvador Garcia, a student whose father had been deported, and who had been approached by a recruiter when he was a freshman at Garfield (He is now a senior). Garcia says the recruiter told him: "If you need papers, come and fight for us and we can get you some, and then you'll never have to mess with immigration." When he told the recruiter that he was born in this country, the recruiter responded, "Do you have anybody in your family that needs a green card, needs papers?" Salvador told him that his father, who had entered the country illegally from Mexico, had recently been deported. "If you join the military you can get your father back," the recruiter said. "It's not a problem, we can get him his papers and nobody will ever bother him again." Salvador almost signed the enlistment form right then, but says he was stopped by the realization of "how it's all connected—the war and Mexico and immigration." He is now active in the counter-recruitment movement.

Recruiters in other parts of the country are making the same promises. In Chicago, for example, Jorge, whose entire family was illegal, joined the military because a high school recruiter promised that he and every member of his family would get a green card. Jorge actually did get a green card while he was in Iraq, but he became so angry and disillusioned when the military did nothing for his family that he went AWOL.

He is now back in Chicago, where a counter-recruitment activist named Juan Torres, whose only son was killed in Afghanistan, is working on getting him discharged from the military. Torres works with a number of counter-recruitment groups, including Gold Star Families for Peace and Military Families Speak Out, but mostly he works on his own, speaking at churches and schools around the country. He estimates that in the past year, close to 200 students have told him that they have been offered green cards for enlisting, and he says he personally knows of "five or six illegal families who have kids without papers in Iraq." Torres talked one teenage girl into changing her mind just as she was about the sign the enlistment papers. He says that the recruiter told her, "Now you're in trouble, you and your family, you will have to leave." And Torres says he once asked a recruiter, the son of one of his friends, "How can you lie to the kids like that?" The recruiter told him, "Sorry, it's my job, and I don't want to go back to Iraq."

Despite the mounting evidence of these recruitment practices, the Pentagon denies that illegal immigrants are in the military. "If there are any," says Pentagon spokesman Joseph Burtas, "then they have fraudulently enlisted, and when they're caught, they are discharged."

That is what happened to Army Pvt Juan Escalante, whose illegal status was discovered while he was serving in Iraq. He was discharged and shipped home, and ICE began deportation proceedings against him and his parents, who had smuggled him into the United States from Mexico when he was four years old. However, Escalante's unit commander wrote a letter on his behalf, saying he had served with distinction, so ICE reversed its decision and accepted his citizenship application. The deportation case against his parents, who also have two U.S.-born children, is still pending.

Another illegal immigrant serving in Iraq, Jose Gutierrez, was not so lucky. He was one of the first members of the U.S. armed forces to die during the invasion. Gutierrez had made his way to this country from Guatemala in 1996, at the age of 15, to escape the violence perpetrated by the death squads, only to be killed in Iraq by friendly fire. When the Pentagon announced his death, it came in the form of a carefully managed PR campaign that included a posthumous award of citizen-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARREDONDO FAMILY

ship for Gutierrez, presumably to show that if an illegal immigrant manages to enlist and make it to Iraq, he will be rewarded. However, Gutierrez remains the only illegal alien on the U.S. casualty rolls whose real hometown is listed, while others who die are reported to be from Boston or Los Angeles, or wherever a recruiter finds them. In New York City, according to counter-recruitment activist Melida Arredondo, whose young stepson was killed in Iraq, DEP recruiters instruct illegal immigrants to write "New York City" as their "home of record address" on the enlistment form, and to write "pending" for their Social Security number.

Non-citizen soldiers

Why is all of this happening, when the enlistment and expedited naturalization of illegal immigrants serving in the armed forces is specifically authorized in U.S. law? An Executive Order signed by President Bush on July 3, 2002, provided for the "expedited naturalization for aliens and noncitizen nationals serving in an active-duty status in the Armed Forces of the United States during the period of the war against terrorists of global reach." Under this order, any noncitizen in the military can apply for expedited citizenship on his first day of active duty. Not only is this order still in effect, but it has been codified in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2006, that authorizes the enlistment of (1) nationals of the United States; (2) aliens who have been lawfully admitted for permanent residence (green card); (3) residents of several former U.S. territories; and (4) any other person "if the Secretary of Defense determines that such enlistment is vital to the national interest."

With the law so clear on this issue, the treatment of illegal immigrants in the military, both by the Pentagon and by ICE, is difficult to understand. "Apparently," says Lt. Col. Margaret Stock, a nationally known immigration attorney and professor of military law at West Point, "nobody at the Pentagon reviewed the [regulations] on immigrants when the war started." She adds, "If the Pentagon has any immigration attorneys, I haven't met them."

Stock speculates that if the Pentagon is aware of the law, it might be "afraid there would be a political backlash" if the use of immigrant labor for the war

were discussed openly. In a later e-mail, she added, "And by the way, the Pentagon has ALWAYS had the authority to recruit foreigners in wartime. ... The only thing that changed in January 2006 [when Bush signed the NDAA] was that Congress made it HARDER for the Pentagon to recruit foreigners who are not Lawful Permanent Residents. It used to be that ANYONE could join the military

As long as American citizenship remains a kind of salvation myth for Latinos, military recruiters will be able to exploit their longing for it.

in wartime—even undocumented immigrants—but now the Service Secretaries have to find that an undocumented person's enlistment is 'in the vital interest' of the United States."

To illustrate her point, Stock noted that a section of the 2006 Immigration and Nationalization Law locates the naturalization of immigrants serving in Iraq firmly in the tradition of naturalizations "during World War I, World War II, Korean hostilities, Vietnam hostilities, [and] other periods of military hostilities." During these wars, citizenship was granted solely on the basis of three years of honorable service or honorable separation from service (discharge), whether or not the person ever lived in the United States."

"Recruiters trying to fill slots have historically pressed vulnerable people into service," says Dan Kesselbrenner, director of the National Immigration Project, a program of the National Lawyers Guild. "But for some people it's the only way they are ever going to get citizenship."

What recruiters do not tell their targets, however, is that the military itself has no authority to grant citizenship. It forwards their citizenship applications to ICE, which will then scrutinize them and their entire families for up to a year. Created under the Homeland Security Act of 2002 as the successor to the law enforcement arms of both the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the U.S. Customs Service, ICE has been tasked "to more effectively enforce our immigration and customs laws and protect the United States against terrorist attacks." ICE does this, as its website explains, "by targeting illegal immigrants: the people, money and materials that support terrorism and other criminal activities."

Recruiters also do not tell their targets that citizenship can be denied for the very same past criminal offenses that the military may have overlooked when admitting them—such as being in the country illegally. Nor do they tell recruits that citizenship can be denied for any kind of dishonorable behavior, which includes refusing to participate in combat. The immigrant law that provides for

the naturalization of illegal immigrants in the military clearly states, "No person who ... was a conscientious objector who performed no military, air, or naval duty ... or refused to wear the uniform, shall be regarded as having served honorably or having been separated under honorable conditions." This means, according to Stock and other military law experts, that while applying for conscientious objector status is not, by itself, grounds for a dishonorable discharge, attempting to act on one's beliefs by refusing to fight, wear a uniform or carry a weapon, constitutes disobeying an order, which is dishonorable behavior.

As the war in Iraq drags on and recruiters step up their efforts to enlist high school students—even demanding the right to come into classrooms—teachers, parents, and students themselves are doing what they can to slow the rate of enlistment of young immigrants who believe that military service is their path to citizenship. But as long as American citizenship remains a kind of salvation myth for the Latino community, military recruiters will be able to exploit their longing for it.

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill (S 1639), which failed to pass the Senate in June, proposed to give legal permanent residency to any "alien who has served in the uniformed services for at least 2 years and, if discharged, has received an honorable discharge." In other words, illegal immigrants have been in the military all along, and the government was getting ready to admit it. Now, with the bill's defeat, they will be forced to remain hidden, and the sacrifices they have made for this country will continue to go unacknowledged. ■

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

The New Children's Crusade

In April 2005, Lance Corp. Vincent J. Emanuele was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps and returned to his home in Chesterton, an old steel town in northern Indiana, 40 miles east of Chicago. Emanuele, 23, is now enrolled at Purdue University North Central and studying

political science. He plans to go on and get his doctorate, if not in political science then in one of the liberal arts. But today his main goal in life is stopping the war in Iraq. The vehicle of his activism is Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), the antiwar group founded in 2004 and modeled after Vietnam Veterans Against the War. *In These Times* spoke with Emanuele after Memorial Day weekend, during which he participated in antiwar events in New York and Chicago.

How did you end up in Iraq?

I was just out of high school when I joined the Marines in 2002. After basic training, I was deployed to Iraq in March 2003 as an infantryman. We were stationed at al-Asad Air Base near the Euphrates River in western Iraq next to the Syrian border. Even though we had been given the whole spiel about winning hearts and minds in training, it was far too hostile to interact with the local people.

I didn't know how people from other cultures lived, and I had never seen the destruction and death that you can only see during a war. I was ignorant on both counts, as many people are in our country.

When did you change your mind about the wisdom of this war?

In 2004. What did it for me was *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which really gave me a new perspective.

Being over there with an antiwar mindset was difficult. The guys I was

with knew I was opposed to the war, and I had a lot of support from them, even if they didn't agree with me. But whenever I would voice my opinion to commanding officers, I was told to shut up.

Knowing what I knew, it was difficult to go on combat patrols and kick doors in and have to pull my trigger in self-defense. My attitude shifted particularly in terms of not wanting to take anyone's life. Unfortunately, we encountered scenarios that dictated differently.

How has your family responded to your activism?

My mom and dad have been very supportive, which is a big help. I know several veterans who don't have that, who have parents who have very different political ideologies.

What did you think of the Iraqis you were shooting at?

I understood the perspective of those who were hostile to us. I knew where they were coming from. I tried to imagine what it would be like to be in the suburbs I was from in Indiana and have a foreign army patrolling our streets and kicking our doors in and killing innocent people—because, of course, innocent people are killed. I came to the conclusion that I probably wouldn't be doing anything different from what the fighters in Iraq are doing right now.

You spent the Sunday before Memorial Day doing mock patrols of New York with other members of IVAW. Why?

The entire weekend was very emotional, especially the event in New York. We put on a guerilla theater. We dressed up in full combat and patrolled the city, holding our hands like we were holding guns, like we patrolled villages in Iraq. It was difficult because I thought that was a person in my life that I had put behind me and forgot—and it was surprising how easily I fell back into that routine of being a soldier and that scared me. It brought back memories of really rough times.

We wanted to show what it was like to have an occupying force in their country. And it made me angry to see the reaction of some people. When other veterans were passing out flyers, people would take them and, without looking at them, throw them away. But most people on the streets were just freaked out.

I can only imagine what the American people would do if there were bombs going off on every corner. People will say that is the great thing about America—that we have never had to go through anything like that. But I think that is the problem, we have never had to go through anything like this.

You said you once killed a man. What happened?

We were at our base camp, near the Euphrates River in our little wooden shack, our "C-Hut," and we got called that we needed to re-supply our platoon's second squad with wood. They were at a communications center about 20 miles away, overlooking the city of Al Qa'im. It was Feb. 15, 2005, and they were getting a little chilly.

We delivered the wood and stood around and BSed and then headed back to base. I was the A-driver, the shotgun rider, in the second vehicle in a four-vehicle convoy. I remember the moon was spectacular and I faded asleep. At about the halfway point, I was woken by two deafening gun shots and our squad leader shouting and pointing off into the field.



Vince Emanuele, holding a red carnation, honors the dead at a Memorial Day service at the Vietnam War Memorial on the banks of the Chicago River.

We thought it was somebody who was planting a bomb, and so we started driving off into the field. I caught a glimpse of a silhouette. It was a man running, in a flash of a second he was gone, he jumped down into an irrigation ditch. I exited the vehicle and all I could think while approaching the ditch was, "Please do not pop up and shoot me in the face. Please do not pop up and shoot me." I looked down but couldn't see a thing. I emptied my entire magazine of rounds into the ditch. I couldn't stop pulling the trigger.

Lance Corp. Villa came running toward me with a flashlight, and there he was dead, no more than a few feet in front of my face. To this day I can't remember why, but when Villa put that light on him I fired two more rounds into his already bloody corpse. Maybe out of fear of him still being alive or possibly me having to care for a man I had already killed.

Upon picking up the body we saw that I had shot the man in the back of the head. His forehead had a baseball size gaping hole from where the bullet exited. We

checked him for bombs, and from there we waited for the explosive experts to arrive. They found that there were four men who had been planting a bomb in the road.

There's something sensational about taking another human life, my immediate reaction was that of accomplishment, satisfaction, of being a "hero." That euphoric feeling faded fast. On the way home I felt numb. Back at the base we arrived to a small crowd of fellow Marines who had heard the news. They were congratulating and patting me on the back. I remember wanting to get to the showers as fast as possible. The rest of that night I felt as if he were watching my every step. I hadn't felt such fear since I was a young boy.

That wasn't the last time I had to discharge my weapon. Two days later we were ambushed and my best friend was killed in a five-hour firefight with insurgents. Maybe God was showing me what it was like to have a life so close taken so fast. I found out real quick what killing and the tragedies of war were like, all

within a 72-hour span of time.

I struggle with it to this day.

I let a lot of people know what I was going through and I got a lot of support. A Vietnam vet told me, "The only thing that is dumber than going to Vietnam was getting killed in Vietnam."

This war is tragic. It was not needed. To die in this war is a wasted death. Had I died, I would have indeed died for nothing—or maybe not for nothing, but for oil and dollars and cents. To be brutally honest, the war was a money-making machine. And it hurts to think of it that way and that you have been used.

What else did that experience teach you?

With the possibility of dying or being hurt on a daily basis, I learned never to take life for granted.

I have come to grips with the fact that I had to fire my weapon and that I had to engage hostiles, but I plan to use my experience and what I have learned to help end this war, to help veterans with benefit issues, or family issues or personal issues. That is a large part of what Iraq Veterans Against the War does. It is not just a political group. It is a family. It provides a space where guys who feel the way we do about the war can come together to talk and have someone there who has shared the same experiences, who can comprehend what you have been through, who will listen without judging you, without thinking you are a little crazy.

I would love to see every veteran who served over there come back and say, "This [war] is bullshit that needs to end tomorrow." But I understand that when you are shipped off to something that you can give your life or limb for, you want to believe in the cause.

What are your plans for the future?

I am going to be in the antiwar movement until the day I die. I plan to be as active as possible in Students for Peace in Iraq, and the Northeast Indiana Coalition Against the Iraq War, but mostly IVAW doing events and helping out in any way I can.

The Vietnam Veterans Against the War have guided us and helped us along our way. Seeing the time and dedication of these men and women is an inspiration. It is so easy for us to relate to one another. Our stories are eerily similar, even though they are separate wars separated by 40 years. ■



Malalai Joya with clan leaders in Afghanistan in 2005 from the film *Enemies of Happiness*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIL AHMAD

BY RACHEL LEARS

What's Up Silverdocs?

In the hard sunlight of the American desert, a renegade architect fits a gleaming slice of blue bottleglass into the mud wall of a fully sustainable home. Just hours later, a heftyman in mask and tights dumps bovine entrails on the steps of the city

council building in Mexico City to protest bullfights and promote animal rights legislation. Meanwhile, Chinese eight-year-olds are negotiating shifting alliances and secretive buy-offs in the ruthless race to become class monitor.

All over the world, people are passionately exerting themselves in ways you might never have imagined. At the Silverdocs AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival (Silver Spring, Md., June 12–17), five screens opened windows on to some of these stories.

Some of the more than 100 documentaries screened at the festival are already scheduled for theatrical release in the fall. *A Walk Into the Sea: Danny Williams and the Warhol Factory* (Esther Robinson, United States, 2007) tells the story of a forgotten member of Andy Warhol's inner circle,

young filmmaker Danny Williams, who disappeared one night in 1966. Directed by Williams' niece, the film combines the enigmatic 16mm images he left behind with interviews with his contemporaries. A portrait emerges of a troubled and talented young man caught in creative scene riddled with rivalries, drug abuse, and tensions surrounding the unfair distribution of credit for shared ideas. *In the Shadow of the Moon* (David Sington, United Kingdom, 2006) chronicles the moon landings of 1969–72 through interviews with 10 of the surviving astronauts. These avuncular figures recall their in-flight epiphanies alongside arresting images from NASA's archive, meticulously restored for the big screen.

Many more films, encompassing a swath of U.S.-based and international subjects, are currently

in negotiation for theatrical release or broadcast as of this writing. The best presented broad themes including sustainable development, social activism and the democratic process, with unexpected twists supplied by charismatic and compelling characters.

"If you create your own electricity, heating and water systems, you create your own politics. Maybe that's what they're afraid of," says architect Michael Reynolds, hero of *Garbage Warrior* (Oliver Hodge, United Kingdom, 2007), which had its U.S. premiere at Silverdocs. Reynolds transforms trash into sustainable houses that are as aesthetically captivating as they are utilitarian. These "earthships" collect rainwater with curvaceous roofs and filter it four times for reuse, grow food in lush greenhouses, and harness wind and solar energy to keep inhabitants off the grid. *Garbage Warrior* presents its visionary protagonist with beautiful cinematography, offbeat humor and a gripping narrative that follows Reynolds as he pursues innovation in sustainable design with an increasing sense of urgency.

Crisscrossing the country in the cabs of 18-wheelers, *Big Rig* (Doug Pray, United States 2007) seeks to demystify and redeem trucking in America. The film profiles 13 truckers of varying backgrounds who tell of near-death accidents, the troubles that led them to trucking and the empowering independence that the open road offers. The common thread, however, is their discontent with worsening working conditions and a general lack of respect for their labor, which (literally) drives the U.S. economy.

Meanwhile, south of the border, five "social *luchadores*" don the shiny masks, capes and tights of the *Lucha Libre* as they fight for social justice in Mexico City. *Super Amigos* (Arturo Pérez Torres, Mexico/Canada, 2007) profiles these real-life Super Friends. Only one has actually been a professional wrestler: Fray Tormenta (Friar Storm), a real priest who entered the sport to support the orphanage he runs. (The 2006 movie *Nacho Libre* was loosely based on his story.) Super Gay counsels hate crime victims and organizes the pride parade; Super Animal lobbies for animal rights; Ecologista Universal creates guerrilla performance art to raise environmental awareness;

and Super Barrio has been helping poor families to resist eviction since the mid-1980s. The film playfully presents the origin of each character through animation, and frames their exploits with zany music, but doesn't flinch from showing the gravity of the social ills that they are up against. The Super Amigos remain

side of the world, *Enemies of Happiness* (Eva Mulvad, Denmark, 2006) chronicles the last few weeks of Malalai Joya's campaign to become the first woman elected to parliament in Afghanistan. Joya has made many enemies with her candid denunciations of entrenched warlord power structures. Flanked by tight security, she re-

The best docs presented broad themes including sustainable development, social activism and the democratic process, with unexpected twists supplied by charismatic characters.

masked throughout the film and their anonymity reminds us of everyone's capacity to take up these battles.

Chicago 10 (United States, 2007), a new film from Academy Award-nominated director and producer Brett Morgan, provides historical perspective on politics as (in the words of Abbie Hoffman) "theater and magic." The film eschews the normal talking-head-style interviews, instead using archival footage and animation to tell the story of the 1968 riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and the subsequent conspiracy trial of eight protesters. Scripts for the animated sequences were culled directly from thousands of pages of trial transcripts, and voiced by actors including Nick Nolte, Hank Azaria and Liev Schreiber. The tone is alternately harrowing and humorous as the archive takes us from shocking images of police violence to stand-up performances in which Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin reflect upon the absurdity of the trial process. Dark oddities also appear, such as a television report on a new kids' game involving plastic clubs, observed on the streets of Chicago during the 1968 convention: "Cops and Demonstrators." The soundtrack is contemporary and gritty, featuring groups like the Beastie Boys and Rage Against the Machine. This invocation of "the music of protest today," according to Morgan, reflects a desire to make the story accessible to viewers who did not live through that time. *Chicago 10* brings the story of the embattled anti-war movement to life, at a moment when selective historical memory often dismisses its vitality.

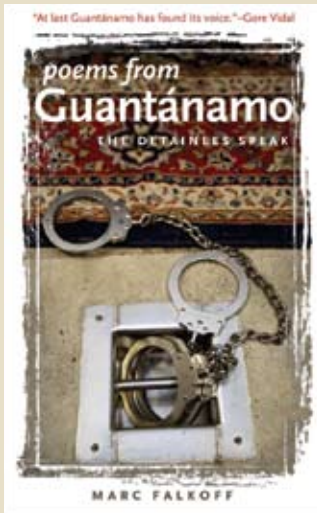
Back in the 21st century, on the other

ceives visits from supporters who beseech her for help resolving local disputes, and passionately defends individual freedoms to groups of rural women, who will vote for the first time in this election. A sensitive portrait of a truly inspiring subject, *Enemies of Happiness* won a Special Jury Mention at Silverdocs.

Please Vote For Me (Weijun Chen, China, 2007), which follows three Chinese school children in their campaign to become class monitor, received the Sterling award for Best Feature. Although the stakes appear small, this hilarious and visually striking film actually offers a glimpse of greater social currents in China. The camera follows the candidates from impeccable classrooms to urban, middle-class homes where parents rather obsessively coach their only children on tactics from public speaking to buying votes. Ultimately, the film is a suggestive portrait in miniature of the complexity of the democratic process of the world's largest Communist country. As part of the series "Why Democracy?" which includes 10 one-hour documentaries from around the world, *Please Vote For Me* will be broadcast worldwide in October (networks TBA at www.whymodemocracy.net).

These films personalize huge, familiar questions with surprising, crystalline specifics. Only time will tell which of them will come soon to your local theater (or satellite dish, Netflix warehouse, or video-on-demand download site). Taken together, they animate a maze of stories unfolding simultaneously in disparate locales—a patchwork testament to the connections and disconnections between individuals across the world. ■

poems from
Guantánamo
the detainees speak
edited by Marc Falkoff



“At last Guantánamo has found its voice.”—Gore Vidal

“Poetry, art of the human voice, helps turn us toward what we should or must not ignore. Speaking as they can across barriers actual and figurative, translated into our American tongue, these voices in confinement implicitly call us to our principles and to our humanity. They deserve, above all, not admiration or belief or sympathy—but attention. Attention to them is urgent for us.”
—Robert Pinsky

“*Poems from Guantánamo* brings to light figures of concrete, individual humanity, against the fabric of cruelty woven by the ‘war on terror.’ The poems and poets’ biographies reveal one dimension of this officially obscured narrative, from the perspective of the sufferers; the legal and literary essays provide the context which has produced—under atrocious circumstances—a poetics of human dignity.”—Adrienne Rich

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BOOK

Activism Illustrated

By Jen Angel

TODAY, THE FIRST step of a rising activist group is throwing up a website, but a generation ago the visual impact of a group was measured by its posters.

Inkworks Press, a collectively run print shop in Berkeley, Calif., was at the forefront of this visual culture. For its 25th anniversary, Inkworks collected the best of its output into a book celebrating the hundreds of political posters it has printed since its founding in 1974. The project took nearly a decade, but the result, *Visions of Peace & Justice*, was released this spring. The full-color, 150-page book reprints hundreds of posters, many as full-page illustrations.

The book is organized into eight move-

ment-focused chapters: internationalism and peace, labor, racial justice, women's liberation, queer liberation, environment and public health, elections and reform, and arts and culture, each introduced by a short essay from a leader of the respective movement. The art ranges from utilitarian black and white type to striking hand-drawn montages. Date and artist information is given for posters when available. Flipping through this book is an illustrated tour of the last three decades of activism. Many of the images reproduced are iconic—like the one of Mother Jones created by Rupert Garcia for *Mother Jones* magazine in 1989.

Among the most compelling images are a 1984 poster for the Nicaragua Information Center by Doug Minkler and the “Trees for Haiti” poster created by Mia Truskier in 1997. The best posters encapsulate an entire political struggle. In 2003, voters in California voted on Proposition



54, which would have banned the state from collecting racial data on its citizens. Civil rights groups argued that this ban would limit the state's ability to address racial disparities in health care and education. The "No on Proposition 54" poster created by Design Action in 2003 shows a No Parking/Street Sweeping sign altered to say "No Diversity 12 pm to 12 pm."

While the posters were often connected to struggles in specific locales, as a means of political solidarity, the posters traveled the globe. In her preface, Carol Wells, executive director of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, writes about a poster she designed in 1979 to benefit the Nicaragua literacy campaign. "In the mid-1980s a Nicaraguan friend in Los Angeles told me about a new poster that had just arrived from Nicaragua. When he showed it to me I laughed, because it was the first poster I had ever designed."

Printers like Inkworks had influence outside their immediate region. In 1992, during the riots that followed the Rodney King beating, Inkworks posters proclaiming the Malcolm X quote, "I don't see an American Dream, I see an Ameri-

can nightmare," were sent to Los Angeles. Inkworks was not the only press doing this work—Red Sun Press in Boston and Salsedo Press in Chicago are two of the other remaining shops—but Wells notes that of the 16 female-owned shops, none remain.

Inkworks Press has also practiced what it has printed over all these years. The collectively run business has provided living-wage jobs to dozens of activists and created an atmosphere that encourages workers to discuss and reflect on politics

and activism. At the back of the book, they reprint their "Points of Unity," a manifesto about ideal and just working and social conditions. Sustainable institutions are an important part of creating sustainable change, and the left needs more documentation of groups that have done this well.

Visions of Peace & Justice holds more than stimulating illustrations. It is evidence of the power of political art and the role the political poster has played over the past several decades. It is a testament to a collective of individuals who have dedicated themselves to the movement for social change. ■



From left: "Proposition 54," by Design Action, 2003; poster for the Nicaragua Information Center by Doug Minkler, 1984; "Trees for Haiti" by Mia Truskier, 1997.

FILM

Iraq: Mismanagement or Mass Murder?

By Mike Atkinson

TAKE A STEP back and scan the media horizon for what it is, and something surprising arises from the vast, swampy trashland of corporate balmoney and thought-control—the protest documentary. As in, *hundreds* of them, in theaters, on DVD and on TV. On-the-shoulder non-fiction films about the Bush administration and the Iraq war have proliferated like dandelions on a landfill. (You could count the feature docs about the Vietnam War made during the conflict itself on two hands.) We are witness to the most concentrated explosion of anti-war, anti-elite cultural action ever created.

But so what? The tsunami of movies has made little difference in the end. What the Bush Administration has conscientiously proven in its two terms is that if a cabal of mercenary schemers wants to twist the system to manufacture at least a temporary monarchal society, in which citizens have no input or voice, it can. The movies, coming week after week for years, enabled by digital technology in production as well as distribution, can only raise so much of a rumpus in the country's tired, under-informed and often infantile forebrain.

Such will surely be the case, at no large fault of its own, for Charles Ferguson's *No End in Sight*, which at least has a special Jury Prize from the 2007 Sundance film festival on its resume. A supremely glossy, logical, high-end doc that takes task with the spectrum of the Bush administration's actions from 9/11 to late 2006, Ferguson's film is intelligence-report methodical, providing a primer on how we got into Iraq and what screw-ups have made the situation spiral out of control. If you attend to news like we all should (but far too few actually do), this material should be already familiar: the alien-agenda that sought to create a link between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein (and, arriving at none, settled for unsubstantiated declarations and full-speed-ahead war making anyway); the Rumsfeld-Cheney-Wolfowitz prevarications as to the war's rationales; the ongoing sunny spin on the country's



A scene of the Iraq war from *No End in Sight*, directed by Charles Ferguson.

collapse into anarchy (Rumsfeld's "Henny Penny, the sky is falling" comment is recycled a few times).

The body of Ferguson's film is concerned with the catastrophic minutiae of "postwar" reconstruction and security, or lack thereof, and this is where the film steps completely into an inoffensive "centrist" borderland so comfortably occupied at present by most of the mainstream media. Granted, Ferguson's focus on individual acts and decisions is admirably thorough—Cheney & Co. are never far from being held accountable (unlike Bush, whom Ferguson presumes is a complete stooge), from the ridiculous lack of reconstructive planning and the inadequate employment of troops, to Paul Bremer's policy decisions that essentially created an angry, jobless and bloodthirsty insurgent army out of the standing Iraqi military, and therein helped turn a beleaguered country on the edge of decimation into a killing field. In fact, Ferguson has little work to do here—the press conferences of Rumsfeld alone could be edited together into the most damning, ludicrous portrait of duplicitous American power ever assembled. But the film depends also on fresh talking-heads interviews, specifically with the likes of ex-ORHA director Jay Garner, Col. Paul Hughes, ex-Ambassador Barbara Bodine, ex-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and ex-Coalition Provisional Authority senior advisor Walter Slocombe, who provide a minute-by-minute recounting of what went so terribly wrong on the ground.

The defiant moral gravity of Bodine and

Hughes, in particular, is hypnotic (whereas Slocombe, defending his and Bremer's death-dealing mismanagement, cannot stop lying). But already we're far afield. The question in the American media in 1971 wasn't, "why did we invade Indochina, and who's going to be held responsible for the millions of civilian deaths?" but instead, "how did the conflict go wrong, away from our noble ideals, and why shouldn't we pull out before it gets worse?" Today, we're hearing the identical refrain: we tried to do good, but now it's a quagmire, the Bushian chant of "victory" has become hollow nonsense, let's think about how it went wrong and how we can disentangle ourselves from its grasp. This may be a way we can all live with ourselves, but it's also an evil perversion of reality.

Indeed, Ferguson is characterized in his press packets as an ex-wonk who "initially supported the invasion"—chilly words, once you doff the Rummy-realpolitik rose-colored shades. The film proceeds as if the war *had* an opportunity to be a righteous action, and might've resulted—by accident?—in a better life for the Iraqi people. But the first bombings of 2003, and the subsequent invasion, killed, conservatively, more than 10,000 Iraqi civilians in just a few months (the actual body count may well be five times as high). The numbers of injuries, disabilities, destroyed homes and refugees just in the spring and summer of 2003 alone were enormous, long before Bremer and his team stepped into the fray (though exact figures, due to the supervisory amorality that Ferguson details

so attentively, are impossible to find). By any human standard, it was wrong, it was fueled by lies and disregard for innocent life, and is tantamount to mass murder, period.

Copious blood and fire footage notwithstanding, Ferguson's outrage seems reserved for pencil-pusher hubris and misguided administrative technique. For a gloss over the fundamental homicidal point of state aggression, and a focus instead on "how things are going," we have Fox News. ■

BOOKS

China Plays Hardball with Soft Power

By Jehangir S. Pocha

PIRATED TRANSLATIONS OF Dale Carnegie's *How To Win Friends and Influence* people are available on most Chinese street corners, and it would appear Chinese Communist Party officials have picked up a few copies. Maoist China used to assert itself on the world stage by exporting revolution, waging wars, funding insurgents and broadcasting subversive propaganda across Asia. But today's Chinese leaders have learned the value of a warm smile and firm handshake. Since "We couldn't beat 'em, let's charm 'em" appears to be Beijing's new dictum, China's new global ambassadors are not chiseled-faced "Red Guards" in fatigues, but svelte-suited diplomats, film personalities such as Wong Kar Wai and the amply bosomed Gong Li, designers such as Vivienne Tam, intellectuals such as Ha Jin, and billionaire businessmen.

This is partly natural. As China has opened its door and mind to the world, the once-stifled economic and artistic creativity of this ancient nation has grabbed the attention of people all over the world. But as Joshua Kurlantzick outlines in his disarmingly easy-to-read new book, *Charm Offensive*, the rollout of this new "China chic" has been as carefully choreographed by the Chinese government as a big-ticket Hollywood premiere. Beijing's goal: the acquisition of what Harvard professor Joseph Nye,

Jr. calls "soft power," i.e. the influence a nation enjoys when its culture and ways become admired by others.

I studied under Nye in 1999 and he was already of the opinion that China and India would be the new "soft superpowers." But even Nye must be surprised at how aggressively Beijing has moved. China's motley soft power campaigners are aggressively traversing the developing world, offering to grow trade ties, build roads, schools and hospitals, mostly in a bid to gain access to much-needed raw materials and win friends at the United Nations. The campaigner's first ports of call are usually capitals alienated or ignored by the Washington—places such as Iran, Sudan and Burma, where the Chinese eagerly take up the great power space once occupied by the United States. One of the most literal examples that Kurlantzick outlines in his book is Songkhla City in Thailand, a country currently out of favor with Washington because it is under military rule. There, the erstwhile American consulate has been taken over by a Chinese economic agency. In other countries such as France, India and

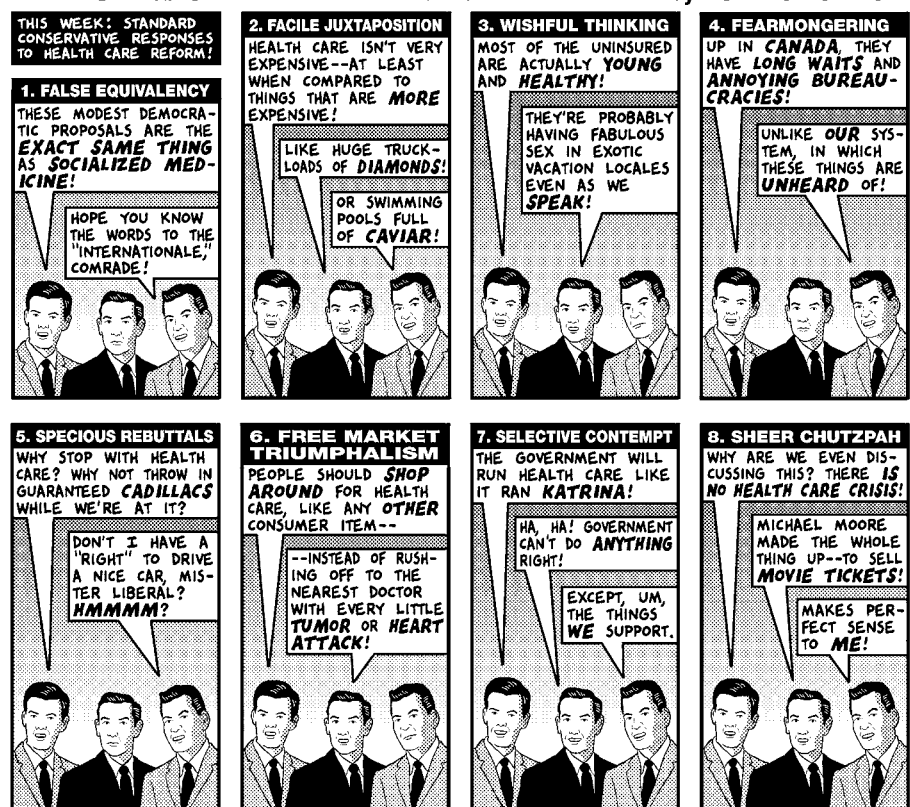
Brazil, the Chinese attempt to create positive perceptions by setting up Mandarin language institutions and even Buddhist study centers, a particularly intriguing tactic since China remains officially atheist.

Over the four years I spent in Beijing from 2003 to March this year, it became increasingly obvious that the key desire of the Communist Party leadership is to articulate China's growing power in a non-threatening way and to dampen the growing concern over what the Middle Kingdom's resurgence will mean for the world economically, militarily, environmentally and culturally.

Kurlantzick seems uncomfortable with this, indeed with China's entire current obsession of becoming a *da guo*, or great nation, which he fears will turn China into an "alternate pole" of power. But that's a U.S.-centric point of view, short on independent merit. China's quest for soft power is no more manipulative and no less mendacious than America's own, which commenced after the onset of the Cold War, when rock 'n' roll, jazz and Hollywood were freely used by government-funded institutions such as Radio

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Free Asia to sell the American Dream and out-shout Soviet propaganda that promised just societies.

Indeed, many Westerners seem unable to tear themselves away from the working assumption that whatever China does is sinister, dubious and suspicious, even if their own countries do exactly the same thing. For example, in a recent book called *China Shakes The World*, James Kyngé blasts Chinese officials for being too focused on fossil fuels and GDP growth—as if Washington's or London's priorities are any different.

Ironically, such perceptions are precisely why Beijing believes it needs to invest in soft power. After all, authoritarian and hard-nosed as Beijing might be, it has proved to be a rational actor on the global stage. It riles Beijing that this is seldom recognized, and an undercurrent of worry about “what China will eventually do” persists in many capitals. That's why the core of China's soft power campaign is built around the idea of “China's Peaceful Rise,” a saccharine tagline conceived by Zhang Bijian, a close associate of Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Zhang's line resonates in many nations, particularly where public perception of China has improved in direct proportion to the manner in which perceptions of the United States have deteriorated since President George W. Bush took office. Numerous recent surveys have found that citizens in many countries are growing accustomed to and comfortable with China's growth, even if grave concerns of how the country will use its power remain. The oddest example of this is Cambodia, where a new-found adoration for China stands at odds with the gruesome role Beijing played in supporting the Khmer Rouge that killed 2.5 million Cambodians, about a quarter of the population.

This underlines the dark side of soft power. The “dazzle 'em” approach is expressly designed to obscure more painful truths, such as China's mercantilist trading policies and its continued arms sales to the Sudanese government, which is accused of genocide in the Darfur region. More significantly, China's economic success is also fraying the notion that democracy is necessary for economic growth. For example, many in India take the dim-witted view that the country must surrender its democracy if it wants to develop like China. Kurlantzick covers this element of China's

excerpt



The Pie Thrower's Manifesto

In late June activists gathered in Atlanta for the first-ever U.S. Social Forum. The five-day conference, with the motto “Another World is Possible,” seeks to challenge the existing economic order by promoting diversity and alternative social and economic models. On the last day, a group calling itself “Bakers Without Borders” posted the following manifesto about Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CodePink and founder of Global Exchange, on the Bay Area Indy Media website (www.indybay.org). Benjamin was “pied” that afternoon. She declined to press charges, instead posting a response, along with a dinner invitation to the throwers, at Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/07/02/2238/).

Bakers without Borders and Co-optation Watch take action today at the US Social Forum to demand accountability from a self-appointed “spokesperson” whose actions further the commodification of resistance and sabotage our movement's sustainability and credibility. This person's actions benefit the NGO Industrial Complex at the expense of real democracy and solidarity.

In particular, we hold Medea Benjamin accountable for:

- Publicly siding with the police and municipal authorities against direct actions performed at the World Trade Organization protests of 1999.
- Administrative authority in an organization that hordes *[sic]* funds raised for community organizations in Guatemala.
- Administrative authority in an organization that solicited the economic dependency of residents in Cuba and then abandoned the project, pushing the Cuban participants deeper into poverty.
- Acting as self-appointed spokesperson of the “American Left”. One egregious example is publicly refusing to endorse a call by hundreds of Lebanese citizens for Israel to unconditionally withdraw from Southern Lebanon in the 2006 war, claiming that the American Left would not swallow such a demand.
- Exploiting and dominating movement space, resources, and publicity in the global justice and associated movements.



soft power very succinctly. But here too he slips up in talking about how global perceptions of the United States' own dark deeds are diluted by its own soft power. For example, misdirected American wrath over the 9/11 attacks that killed 3,000 people has resulted in the deaths of 300,000 Iraqi civilians that had nothing to do with terrorism. Yet America's image continues to lend it immense global influence.

Where *Charm Offensive* also disappoints is its lightness of first-hand field reporting and heavy use of analysis based on secondary news sources. Though overall, the book provides a nice peek into one

of the great forces changing our world, Kurlantzick's hypothesis that China's soft power somehow needs to be curtailed—he even devotes the end of the book to outlining how this can be done—seems a bit excessive. For one, soft power has serious limitations, as Nye himself says. Gong Li's mammalian endowments and one-room school houses in Burma cannot entirely distract the world from China's human and labor rights abuses. But more importantly, better a resurgent China hopped up on soft power than on what Mao would have called good old-fashioned hard power. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Sicko's Critics and the Upside of Hitler



THE HEALTH CARE industry is having palpitations over *Sicko*. "I don't think Michael Moore set out to make a balanced movie," said Karen Ignagni, president of the trade group America's Health

Insurance Plans, regurgitating the industry's key talking point. But truth is not always found in the balanced middle. ("Now, for the other side of Hitler," "Cannibalism: the pros and cons"; "Sex with children: Don't throw out the baby with the bath water.")

Not surprisingly, some groups staging responses to *Sicko*, including the Manhattan Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the Pacific Research Institute, are hooked on pharmaceutical company funding, according to Sourcewatch.

They are part of a system that is rotten to the marrow and should be put out of its, and our, misery.

Health care is not a commodity; it is a human right that should be apportioned without regard for accidents of birth, class, sex and race. Of the 46.6 million uninsured Americans, almost one-third (14.1 million) are Latino and almost one in five (7.2 million) are African American. Despite paying 2006 premiums that averaged \$4,242 for individuals and \$11,480 for families, millions avoid care because of limited coverage and high deductibles; many people stay in miserable jobs and marriages for the sake of the insurance.

Including private insurance companies in health care is like giving a kleptomaniac keys to a jewelry store.

Snout-in-trough politicians and industry flaks warn that excising the profit motive will hurt patients. The titles of recent speeches by Billy Tauzin, head of the trade group PhRMA, tell it

all: "Free Market Health Care Solutions Are Best for Patients," and "Putting Patients First to Keep Health Care in America the Best in the World."

But Americans don't get the world's best care. Leaving aside the poor and some racial minorities (we do), middle-aged, white Americans are much sicker than their English counterparts. More of us tested positive for high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes; more of us self-reported lung disease, cancer and strokes, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association, And that is after we spend two times more per capita than the English.

About two dozen countries have longer life expectancy than the United States, according to the World Health Organization. It ranks the U.S. health care system 37th, behind Columbia (22), Saudi Arabia (26) and Dominica (35). Our infant mortality rate is more than twice Japan's.

The lack of primary and preventative medicine partially explains this dismal picture. Doctors are trained to make quick diagnoses and prescribe pharmaceutical and surgical fixes; they are poorly compensated if they take the time to compile histories, evaluate nutrition or provide preventative strategies. Much of their education and income is funneled through Big Pharma. And the industry-controlled system does little to assess the relationship between environmental toxins and conditions such as asthma, cancer, allergies, heart problems and other illnesses that generate billions for drug companies, hospitals and device manufacturers.

The health care industry is a powerful economic force in every state and the biggest lobby in Washington, with influence peddling expenditures at the national level alone exceeding \$2.2 billion for the past decade.

The 18 announced or exploring

presidential candidates reaped \$12.8 million in health care contributions since 1989, according to a study based on data from the Center for Responsive Politics. Contributions in the first quarter of 2007 accounted for almost 30 percent of that amount: Nearly half of that \$3.7 million went to just two candidates, Hillary Clinton (23 percent) and Mitt Romney (22 percent); next came Barack Obama (15 percent), John McCain and Rudy Giuliani (11 percent), and John Edwards (6 percent).

These expenditures are chump change. Pharmaceutical industry profits climbed from \$64.4 billion in 2002 to \$94.8 billion in 2006. During the same period, insurance companies' profits more than doubled from \$20.8 billion to \$57.5 billion.

Some hospitals, too, are blooming with fiscal health. Record aggregate profits reached \$26.3 billion in 2004, thanks in part to the astronomical markups they charge patients. The top 40 hospitals added 2,319 percent on drugs, 5,090 percent on medical supplies, and 1,073 percent on operating room charges.

The 20 largest HMOs sucked in \$10.8 billion in profits in 2004, with 19 percent for overhead verses 1 percent in the non-profit Canadian national health insurance program.

While these figures are enough to sicken anyone, the number that really scares the health care industry is the percent of Americans who prefer not just universal coverage, but a single-payer government-run system that cuts out private insurance. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll put the figure at 62 percent.

You want balance? Balance this: The right of corporations to profit from illness against the right of every person to decent health care. ■

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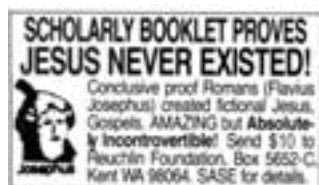
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Giving the Finger

Continued from back page

and assumptions is not out of keeping with Brosnan's conclusions. On his website, Brosnan states:

- "Digit length is fixed in utero and relative digit lengths remains constant through development and is constant across ethnicities."
- "Digit ratio is an index of exposure to prenatal testosterone."
- "Prenatal testosterone slows the growth rate of the left side of the brain while enhancing growth of the right side."
- "The right hemisphere is associated with better visual-spatial and mathematical abilities."
- "Traditional sex differences in visual-spatial and mathematical abilities can be attributed to differences in exposure to prenatal testosterone, indexed by a sex dimorphic pattern in digit ratio."

Brosnan's is not the first study linking finger length to sex hormones. In March 2000, S. Marc Breedlove, who like Brosnan is a psychologist, and other researchers at University of California at Berkeley, published a study in the journal *Nature* that ostensibly described the proper "masculine" and "feminine" hand configurations, and claimed that people whose hands deviate from these characteristic shapes are likely to be homosexual.

In the Breedlove study, straight men and lesbians were found to have longer ring fingers than index fingers on their right hands. Straight women and gay men had index and ring fingers of about equal length, although this was mitigated by whether a gay man had older brothers, in which case his hand was likely to have the shorter index finger common to straight men and lesbians—only *way* shorter.

The syllogism implicit in the two studies is that women who are good at math and science are likely to be lesbians.

The Berkeley researchers based their conclusions on the hands of 720 volunteers they recruited at street fairs in San Francisco, volunteers who agreed to have their fingers measured and to answer a questionnaire about their birth order and sexual preferences, in exchange for a \$1 lottery ticket. Given all the media attention, websites and e-mail forwards it spawned, that seems a very small and curious sam-

ple. Still, it was nearly 10 times the size of Brosnan's.

It would be interesting to compare the finger lengths of either test's subjects to those of other members of their families—gay or straight, math-averse or astrophysicist—including the older brothers of the gay men in the Breedlove study. But the researchers never looked at them.

Their generalizations based on hand shape not only are formulated from small

Generalizations based on hand shape not only are formulated from small pools of data, but smack of pseudo science.

pools of data, but smack of pseudo science. And not so much palmistry—although its practitioners maintain that a short ring finger indicates someone who is shy and lacking in emotional control (sounds like that stereotypical woman again, doesn't it?)—as phrenology.

Phrenology was based on observations made by German neuroanatomist Franz Josef Gall (1758–1828), who published his first work on the subject in 1791. During the 18th and 19th centuries, phrenologists maintained that your personality, character, level of intelligence and morality could be gauged by examining the shape of your head. Bumps in one of 42 delineated areas, called faculties, supposedly indicated a predilection for combativeness when they appeared behind the ear, pride when found at the crown or musical ability when occurring near the temple. From phrenology, we retain the notions of the egghead and the lowbrow in popular speech if not in scientific theory.

Gall's conclusions, which have been discredited and dismissed, were based on the same scientific method as those of Brosnan and Breedlove. Gall observed, hypothesized and published in good faith. Phrenology was in its day a respected "confident science," as Pierre Schlag observed in the *Harvard Law Review* in 1997, with its own scientific publication, the *American Phrenological Journal*.

Phrenology enabled an early form of criminal profiling. Among its adherents were Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), creator of Sherlock Holmes; and Alan Pinkerton (1819–1884), founder of the eponymous detective agency known for its role in the 1886 Haymarket massacre.

"This science," asserted an unbylined

article about phrenology in the June 2, 1838 edition of *Knickerbocker Magazine*, "enables the teacher to understand the mental capacities of his pupils, and to adapt their studies accordingly. It should decide one in the choice of his profession, and settle upon his walk in life."

In eerily similar language, Brosnan said on May 23 that "finger ratio provides us with an interesting insight into our innate abilities in key cognitive areas,"

and that he and his colleagues "are also looking at how digit ratio relates to other behavioural issues, such as technophobia, and career paths."

When Lawrence H. Summers, then-president of Harvard University, said in a January 14, 2005 speech that innate biological differences between men and women were the reason that women were under-represented "in tenured positions in science and engineering at top universities and research institutions," he attributed his assumptions to "what we've learned from empirical psychology in the last 15 years."

What he had learned, that is, from the work by empirical psychologists in the mold of Brosnan and Breedlove.

AN OUTCRY ENSUED, and the entire episode ultimately cost Summers his job. Throughout the controversy, the political right alleged that not only was Summers being unfairly sacrificed, but that actual science was being suppressed in the name of political correctness.

Back in 1838, the *Knickerbocker* writer lashed out against his own detractors and contended it was not "immoral" to base character assumptions on the bumps on someone's head, likening it to predictions that a man with one leg shorter than the other would walk with a limp. "Am I to be blamed for having discovered the cause of his lameness? Why, that I ought to be whipped for the discovery? Ought you not rather to thank me for the discovery, and give the lame man a crutch?"

It's 169 years later, and this is the sort of "science" we're still facing. And for the duration, you may want to keep your hands to yourself. ■

Giving Science the Finger

HERE WE GO AGAIN.

New scientific “evidence” has been released, bolstering the old claim that women who excel at math and science are less feminine—or at any rate more masculine—than their sisters who can’t balance a checkbook or tell the difference between a phenome and a phoneme, but can talk up a storm.

In the August issue of *British Journal of Psychology*, a team of researchers led by psychologist Mark Brosnan of the University of Bath, England, have published findings that suggest women who are good at science and math have longer ring fingers than index fingers, which indicates a relatively high level of prenatal exposure to the male hormone testosterone. Conversely, longer index fingers indicate higher levels of the female hormone estrogen, according to the study, and a corresponding aptitude for verbal communication. The study used standardized test scores of 75 British seven-year-old boys and girls and compared

them to photocopies of the youngsters’ hands.

The media had a field day: “Study Correlates Finger Length to Performance on SAT,” trumpeted FOX News. The widely-linked LiveScience.com asserted: “A quick look at the lengths of children’s index and ring fingers can be used to predict how well students will perform on SATs, new research claims. Kids with longer ring fingers compared to index fingers are likely to have higher math scores than literacy or verbal scores on the college entrance exam, while children with the reverse finger-length ratio are likely to have higher reading and writing, or verbal, scores versus math scores.”

Many of the news reports didn’t mention that the British SAT—upon which Brosnan’s study was based—refers to the Standardised Assessment Test, which is given to all British schoolchildren at age 7, 11 and 14, and is not the same as the U.S. College Board exam that uses the same acronym.

Still, the idea of using finger length to make predictions

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



RICHARD STYLES